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Children of a Lesser Education: Contemporary American Drama and Multiculturalism.

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**Children of a lesser education: Contemporary American drama
and multiculturalism**

Placzek, Walter Holton, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1993

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**CHILDREN OF A LESSER EDUCATION:
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA AND MULTICULTURALISM**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of Theatre

by

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my parents, Walter and Marlene, and my sister, Suzanne. Thank you for all your love and support.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores issues of multiculturalism in contemporary American plays that deal with education. The project begins by identifying the value which the American social order places upon education. It next analyzes the shifting and multiple definitions and connotations of "culture" and "multiculturalism," probing the possible implications of multicultural education for American society. Seven contemporary American plays (all of which place a primary focus upon the educational system and/or process) are examined: Uncommon Women and Others, the one-act and full-length versions of Open Admissions, Children of a Lesser God, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, Another Antigone, and Oleanna. Specific emphasis is given to the representation of the educational system and how multicultural concepts bear upon education, individual cultural entities, and the general social order. The study concludes by synthesizing the individual analyses. We find that, contrary to the American ideal which views education as a vehicle for developing individual opportunity and fostering social change, the educational system, as represented in these plays, acts as a conservative force, one which maintains existing social patterns, fails to accommodate marginalized groups, and functions as an impediment to diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary American drama often confronts social concerns. Some plays directly attack specific issues, such as As Is or The Normal Heart which confront the AIDS crisis. Other works address themes in an indirect fashion, such as American Buffalo, whose focus upon petty thieves extends to comment upon the American values of materialism and capitalism. Still others possess a diverse and complex array of thematic concerns, such as M. Butterfly, which investigates issues of homosexuality and Asian-American relations within the broader context of loyalty, stereotype, and prejudice. As director Gordon Davidson writes of contemporary American drama, "The desire to better come to grips with our political and social realities can lead writers to explorations and insights unattainable on Nightline" (10).

In current American society, the role of the formal educational system has proven a central issue of social concern. Various parties, often with varying interests, use judicial, legislative, and media venues to confront and debate issues of education. Court decisions involving education receive much attention, especially those relating to the economics of school budgets. As of September 1992, twenty-three states were engaged in lawsuits based upon differences in spending between school districts or alleged inadequacies of funding (Celis 13). Racial issues in education also continue to dominate court

dockets. As an example, for the first time in history--excepting previous decisions involving law and graduate schools--the Supreme Court recently addressed the issue of segregation in higher education. The Court concluded, in the 1992 case *United States v. Fordice*, that the state of Mississippi had not necessarily fulfilled its obligation to desegregate its colleges and universities merely by removing legal barriers to admissions. Legislatures struggle with similar issues. The Texas Legislature, after the courts ruled against several of its proposals, recently approved an amendment to the state constitution authorizing the redistribution of funds from wealthier school districts to poorer ones. Yet the amendment still must be approved by public referendum; proponents argue that the funding measure would satisfy judicial concerns, while critics claim the plan would not remedy educational inequities.¹ Parents and local school boards also continue to demand improvement in student test scores. That such books as Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind or Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities should make best-seller lists demonstrates the interest of the general public in educational issues. One cannot doubt that the American public grants privileged attention to education and acknowledges its crucial role in the development of the social order.

The concept of multiculturalism recently has emerged as an issue of contention in education. Curriculum and methods of instruction at the elementary, secondary, and college levels have become focal points of discussion not only within the educational system but also within the general public arena. The definition of multiculturalism is elusive; the word denotes different things to different individuals. Its connotations also differ from person to person. Catherine Stimpson, in her 1990 Presidential Address to the Modern Language Association, underscored some of these varied responses, which range from the belief that multiculturalism in education will substitute "emotion for reason, a thin many-other-worldism for a deep grasp of Western history, philosophy, and art" to the idea that multiculturalism will "bring dignity to the dispossessed and self-empowerment to the disempowered," "recuperate the texts and traditions of ignored groups," and "broaden cultural history" (Stimpson 404). Since education interfaces with such issues as ethnicity and economics, one cannot doubt that the effects of multiculturalism will extend beyond the immediate academic environment to all of American society, including social and political arenas.

If theatre, then, reflects, addresses, reproduces, and/or challenges prevailing social outlooks, and if education and multiculturalism remain at the forefront

of American consciousness, the American theatre cannot help but speak to these issues. How do selected contemporary American plays address the issues of education and multiculturalism? What implicit or explicit statements are made regarding the role of the formal educational system and its influence on various cultural entities? How do the plays use theatrical and textual techniques to highlight their perspectives? This study provides individual play analyses which both emphasize dramatic techniques of the playwrights and locate their thematic approaches to education within the framework of multicultural principles which, as we shall see, connects to broader issues of identity and empowerment.

Neither the individual plays examined in this study nor the overall theme of how drama represents education has received significant critical attention. A wide range of materials is available on multiculturalism in education; since the debate remains current, both scholarly journals and other literature more accessible to the general public continue to provide and synthesize information, theories, and opinions. The notion of theatre itself as a multicultural art form has assumed widespread endorsement; the 1992 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference on "Theatre and Cultural Pluralism" is evidence of this trend. However, limited scholarship exists which connects dramatic texts to multicultural principles and the educational system.

Other than a 1963 dissertation by Porter Jackson Crow ("The Teacher as a Character in American Drama") there appear to be no other other studies which focus upon the representation of the educational process in American drama. A search of Dissertation Abstracts, the Educational Resources Information Center (the computerized data base for educational journals) and the Modern Language Association computerized networks have not provided any articles which directly link dramatic texts to its representation of education.

The study therefore provides practical, critical, and academic value. Theatre practitioners producing any of these plays may benefit from the individual textual analyses. The study may serve those theatre scholars who examine how the theatre event bears upon social issues and extra-theatrical matters. Cultural analysts may use this study as a resource for exploring the artistic representation of American education and multicultural principles. Finally, individuals directly involved in the educational process may gain increased understanding of their own work and institutional contexts, as illuminated by these playscripts and their analyses. Indeed, any scholars examining the interplay of art and social process may broaden their knowledge base with this study.

The plays have been selected for examination based upon a variety of factors. The works place a central

dramatic focus upon the educational process and/or setting. The plays have achieved critical and/or popular acclaim, as demonstrated through production in New York or continued availability/publication. The playwrights themselves may have achieved critical recognition through these works or others. This list is not meant to include all plays in contemporary American drama which touch upon educational issues. We acknowledge that these plays emerge from a mainstream venue; the boundaries of this study are thus established within the commercial theatrical realm.

Chapter One presents an overview of the role of education in the American social order. It discusses the wide latitude of definition assigned to the terms "culture" and "multiculturalism," and relates the background of the multicultural movement and its possible implications for society. The ordering of the play analyses reflects how the texts engage multicultural principles. The first four works depict a singular and marginalized cultural unit aligned in binary opposition against a dominant social structure. Wendy Wasserstein's Uncommon Women and Others examines the role of gender at a women's college. Shirley Lauro, in her one-act and subsequent full-length expansion of Open Admissions, focuses upon issues of race and class within an urban setting. Children of a Lesser God by Mark Medoff addresses the specific

issue of the deaf as "handicapped" (and therefore culturally "different").

The subsequent two works engage multicultural principles through self-examination; a single cultural unit is evaluated from within rather than placed in dialectical opposition to a more dominant social order. Christopher Durang's Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You probes the Catholic elementary school, while Another Antigone by A.R. Gurney looks at an elite, private liberal arts college.

The final work, Oleanna, David Mamet's most recent play (which continues to run in New York) deemphasizes the concept of cultural consciousness. Possession of power marks the singular focal point of conflict between a college student and her professor; cultural identification exists as a tool for manipulation in the primal struggle for domination.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the individual analyses, identifies commonalities and differences among the works, and relates them to an overall portrayal of the educational system and its engagement with multicultural principles. As we shall see, the cumulative perspective indicates the formal educational system as a conservative force, one which maintains existing social patterns, fails to accommodate marginalized groups, and functions as an impediment to diversity.

NOTE: INTRODUCTION

¹ On May 1, 1993, the voters of Texas rejected the proposed amendment, leaving continued doubt upon the legal resolution of public school financing within the state.

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CHAPTER ONE
EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND MULTICULTURALISM

Most would agree that the role of the formal educational system in contemporary American society is one of social, political, economic, and cultural importance. The 1954 decision of the United States Supreme Court in the case *Brown v Board of Education*, which found segregation of public schools unconstitutional, highlights the significance of education in emphatic fashion:

education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditure for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship . . . it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment . . . it is doubtful that any child may be reasonably expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.
(347 US 483 [1954])

Often deemed one of the most important Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century, this ruling underscores (and is indicative of) the value which Americans place upon the formal educational system. Significantly, the Court was unanimous in its agreement upon these principles. The decision stands as a highly prominent social document which reveals much about the American attitude toward

education. Analysis of this passage will serve as a springboard to our understanding of the diverse functions assigned to education as well as to the central importance it holds in contemporary life.¹

This 1954 decision declares outright the value of education in American society. It also illuminates a key fact of American educational life--states and localities bear the primary responsibility for education. Contrary to popular perception, there is no "right" to education guaranteed under the federal constitution; compulsory attendance is mandated by states, not the federal government. In 1852 Massachusetts became the first state to pass a compulsory attendance law. By 1918, all states had some form of mandated attendance. If we accept the view of many psychologists, such as Erik Erikson, that most ethical formation develops in the early years, then the formal educational system takes on great importance, as it imprints upon young children the information and values which will be carried on into both their independent adulthood and collective futures. Using the typology of service organizations developed by behavioral scientist Richard O. Carlson, public schools, along with prisons and mental hospitals, are the only organizations in which neither the client nor the institution has any choice regarding participation. The client must participate; the institution must accept the client (Hoy 40). Even prison might be removed from

this list, since the condition necessary for imprisonment--commission of a crime--could be considered voluntary.

The principles of education specifically designated by the Court clarify and highlight some of the many functions and roles which often have been assigned to the American educational system. Education is "required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces . . . it is the very foundation of good citizenship." This notion that education is necessary for the proper assumption of public responsibilities has existed throughout American political and social history. Thomas Jefferson believed this to be a crucial function of education; for Jefferson, schools were meant

to prepare citizens to be public leaders, to enable all citizens to exercise the common rights of self-government, and to ready all citizens for the pursuit of happiness in society's private sphere. (Helsap 88)

The educational philosopher John Dewey, whose works heavily influenced 20th Century educational thought, also emphasized education and citizenship. His 1918 book Democracy and Education, hailed as perhaps his finest work, suggests democracy as not only a model for American society but also for the classroom itself. Later educators such as Boyd Bode and Bruce Raup further emphasized education as necessary for the success of a democratic society ("democracy" signifying not merely

the populace's ability to vote, but its capacity to think creatively and to adapt to complex situations).

The Supreme Court declares that education should also "prepare" the child "for later professional training." The idea that education should provide a readiness for instruction in professions, and, indeed, that it should function as direct vocational training, extends throughout American history. The academy, popular in the early years of America, was an educational institution designed to teach "practical" skills, as opposed to "ornamental" knowledge. Benjamin Franklin, a chief advocate of the concept, founded what became a model academy in Philadelphia in 1751. In this same vein, a guiding principle of the Common School Reform movement (1820 to 1850) viewed education as a means to prepare youth for factory work. Such 20th century Congressional legislation as the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which provided federal funds for the salaries of high school vocational teachers as well as for teacher training, was designed to encourage vocational education within the public schools.

The court also assigns education the function of "helping the child adjust normally to his environment"--that is, education as adaptation and socialization. This idea also runs through American educational history, albeit in different forms with different purposes. The Common School Reform movement

sought to use the educational system as a tool to integrate and socialize new waves of immigrants entering the country. The educational philosopher Johann Herbart, whose influence dominated the teaching techniques in the United States during the later 1800s, believed that the educational system should be used to help children adjust to their environment; education was thus seen as a tool to assimilate new generations into the social fabric. Social reconstructionists such as George Counts in the 1930's further understood education not as a simple form of passive adjustment but as a method to pursue active social reform through the alteration of economic conditions, and, by consequence, the social environment.

The final function that the Supreme Court assigns to education--and the one most pertinent to this study--involves that of "awakening the child to cultural values." The transmission of cultural values is a fundamental activity of any society; in order for a social order to survive, shared and common values must be passed from generation to generation. As the anthropologist A.E. Hallowell writes, a culture "cannot function . . . except through the social interaction of individuals who have become psychologically structured" within the system (Hallowell 34).

Both the decision of the Supreme Court and the historical background of the American educational system point to the array of educational functions and how

they affect multiple segments of the social order. We see that education participates in a complex chain of social functions, including citizenship and vocation. By extension, education also involves cultural values. This intersection of cultural values and the social process proves the centerpiece of the philosophy of multicultural education. The question which multiculturalism thus begs is this: whose cultural values are to be transmitted?

Before looking at the various definitions and implications of multiculturalism, we must briefly examine the term "culture" itself. The use of this term represents a key to understanding multicultural education, since the concept of culture energizes and defines the multicultural debate within both the formal education system and society as a whole.

In contemporary American society, the use of the word "culture" has undergone a revision. A long-held understanding of the term might best be expressed (as Joseph Roach cites in an introduction to his anthology Critical Theory and Performance) in the words of Mr. Webb, a character in Thornton Wilder's play Our Town, who describes culture as involving "some girls that play the piano at high school commencement . . . Robinson Crusoe . . . Handel's Largo . . . Whistler's Mother" (Roach 9). Such a description provides a fairly accurate sense of what "culture" has signified in a traditional

sense: specific works of art, literature, or music identified as excellent or noble and thus placed inside the category of culture. "Culture" implied a binary opposition between those aesthetic objects or practices deemed worthy of being elevated as models of excellence and other products or elements of the social process. Using Terry Eagleton's tripart definition of the term, we see that this usage of "culture" indicates "a body of artistic and intellectual work of agreed value, and the processes of making and sharing in this work" (Eagleton 3). In Wilder's play the materials which comprised culture, mutually agreed upon, were clear. Piano music and Robinson Crusoe were culture; accordion music and the personal diary of the local farmer would not be.

However, the traditional use of the term culture has not been limited to the artistic arena. Culture also has been used as a term to identify what Eagleton calls

a society's whole way of life in an institutional sense, the totality of interacting artistic, economic, social, political, ideological elements which composes its total lived experience.
(3)

Mr. Webb thus can speak of Greek culture, of Elizabethan culture, or American culture. Yet, as employed in conventional Western thought, such use of the term presumes a heirarchical structure of judgment, one which compares cultures and ranks their relative value according to degrees of technological advancement and acceptance

of the Christian God. Cultures which possess these attributes have been seen as having evolved to a higher order than those which do not. A judgment frequently has been placed upon various civilizations; tribes in Africa have been considered primitive since they have not yet evolved toward a higher, advanced, and more "civilized" culture. Anthropologist Margaret Hodgen cites a statement typical of this perspective: "There is not a heathen nation in the world that can be said to be in a state of progressive civilization" (Hodgen 17).

Both of these uses of the term "culture"--as "high art" and as social groupings informed by a standard of progress--have undergone challenge within the current generation. A more recent use of the term seeks to alter the binary opposition involving "high art" and "low art," producing a more inclusive concept with flexible and diverse boundaries. Indeed, a generation ago the concept of "popular culture" (now an established venue for academic study) would have been considered an oxymoron, since the word culture implied a sense of selective excellence which by definition ran counter to any populist and widespread phenomena. Today the word culture, in its more inclusive sense, suggests not only such items as art, music, or literature, but also can be considered to include any artifact a society produces. Such items as advertising, Barbie dolls, and the style of washing

machines may be thought of as part of the cultural fabric. Also, the common use of the word culture today no longer implies merely the tangible products of society, but also its intangibles as well. Eagleton's definition notes these elements of culture as "society's 'structure of feeling,' the shifting, intangible complex of its lived manner, habits, morals, values" (3). Whereas Mr. Webb's use of the word culture emphasizes the first meaning of Eagleton's explication, contemporary use of the word allows for both his second and third meaning as well.

The use of the word "culture" today, in addition to being more expansive in denotation, seeks to eliminate the previous connotations of progressive evolution and value judgment. The values of technology and Christianity, long accepted standards by which to rank cultures, are now seen as arbitrary and ethnocentric; suspicion falls upon any "objective criteria" used for the heirarchical ordering of either the products of culture or the overall culture itself. Therefore the use of the term emerges as neutral, serving to identify a particular item or group rather than to place judgment upon it. As anthropologist Ashley Montagu writes, "Civilization is the product of innumerable different peoples. No one has a monopoly" (35).

In addition, cultures in contemporary society can be defined by boundaries which are neither temporal

nor geographic. The groupings "race, class, and gender" often appear as standard units in the literature of multiculturalism. As will be seen, early multicultural efforts tend to focus upon ethnicity as the factor that generates a cultural unit. Boundaries can be artificially assigned and are therefore flexible. For example, one may define the culture of female business executives, or the culture of A.A. Milne enthusiasts. Individuals within these groups may not necessarily conceive of themselves as part of these cultures; nevertheless, the ability to conceptualize boundaries in a flexible manner creates the possibility of grouping these individuals within a single identifiable culture. This ability to create cultural awareness forms a focus of multicultural education whereby separate cultures attain self-awareness and desire stronger influence within the formal educational process, and, by extension, the larger social order.

Given the flexible boundaries and wide latitude of definition, cultures exist in various combinations with other cultures. Cultures may exist within each other, such as the culture of Louisiana existing within the boundaries of American culture. Cultures may intersect and/or overlap with one another. The cultures of Spain and France, for example, are separate when based on political boundaries; nevertheless many tangible products and intangible values are common to both. Cultures also

may be distinct. The cultures of 3rd century Sumer and 20th century Australia, for example, have little overlap. Elements of social production may also belong to a variety of cultures, depending on the selected boundaries. For example, the plays of Federico García Lorca could be said to be part of the cultures of Europe, the 20th century, homosexuals, and the Spanish Civil War. Questions consequently emerge as to the demarcations of culture.

Contemporary usage of the term "culture" can have multiple meanings and flexible boundaries. What, then, is "multicultural" education? Using García Lorca as an example, within what framework should he be taught? If he is viewed primarily as a playwright of the Spanish Civil War, does this deemphasize his importance within the homosexual culture? If he is taught as a poet of Spain, does this diminish his status as a product of pre-World War Two Europe? Before examining two denotative and connotative frameworks which serve to demonstrate the vast differences in the use of the term "multicultural education," a short history of the developments which have led to the current state of the multicultural debate in education will prove useful. Educational historian Edwina Battle Void, in her article "The Evolution of Multicultural Education," identifies five historical phases which culminate in the multicultural approach to education which appears in the mid-1970s. As the phases move forward and overlap, we see a clear shift

from an assimilationist model of American society to one where separate and distinct cultural entities seek to forge and integrate their own identity within the overall umbrella of the American social order. Furthermore, this recognition of cultural identity is accompanied by the perception that the dominant social order has ignored or oppressed individual cultural concerns.

Before continuing it is necessary to clarify how the terms "assimilation," "separation," and "integration" will be used through this study. "Assimilation" refers to the point when one culture loses all of its specific cultural identity to become part of another culture. For example, the Roman conquest of various territories stripped such tribes as the Gauls and the Ligures of their unique cultural identity; the tribes adopted various characteristics of Roman culture, such as language. "Separation" refers to the state where two cultures seek to exist separately and without overlap. For example, many Native American reservations in the United States seek to preserve their own customs, tribal rites, and laws with as little non-Native interference or influence as is possible. Finally, "integration" denotes a synthesis of two cultures which takes characteristics from both original cultures. For example, Manuel Ramirez III identifies the cultural "mestizoization" between the European explorers of the American continent and the Native American population as

the confluence and amalgamation of peoples and cultures from two continents as well as the bringing together of cultures, life styles, and world views based on Eastern and Western thought. (25)

As a specific example of integration he cites the "peyote religion," which includes doctrinal and ritualistic elements from both Christianity and Native American religion. These terms apply to individuals within cultures as well to cultures themselves; an individual may seek to assimilate, separate or integrate with another culture.

Void identifies the initial phase in the development toward multicultural education as beginning around 1900. Its basic concept is encapsulated in the idea of America as the "melting pot," a term which emerged from Israel Zangwill's 1907 play of the same name. Zangwill's central character explicitly sets forth this vision of America: "America is God's crucible, the great Melting Pot where all races of Europe are melting and reforming! . . . the real American . . . will be the fusion of all races, the common superman" (19). The idea strongly advocates assimilation to a single dominant order; strength emerges not from separate cultural identities within the American social structure but rather from a sacrifice of these identities for one unique and stronger culture. This view also aligns with the concept of progressive evolution; with God's guidance, the American will be the superman, the culmination of power and right. Under this perspective, diversity weakens rather than strengthens

the American social order. The overall entity of American society seeks to assimilate rather than tolerate cultural distinctions. Note that the melting pot refers to races of Europe; other ethnic groups (such as African-Americans) were not perceived as cultural units and therefore were not considered as part of American society and the assimilative process. As a result of World War One, great emphasis was placed upon loyalty to the United States, thereby directly linking patriotism to the assimilation phenomenon. No longer was the simple shedding of one's culture sufficient; one also needed strong patriotic feelings. Any unique cultural characteristics which had not been dropped were now actively considered un-American. Therefore we see a dynamic in which the overall American social order worked to remove individual cultural differences--strength derived from unity.

A shift in this dynamic became evident, however, following World War II. The return of African-American soldiers after the war directly impacted recognition of cultural distinction. Although they had served their country loyally, the soldiers returned to a United States which was legally segregated. The separation of the races as part of the American social order now seemed artificial to the returning servicemen, given their relatively egalitarian experience in defense of the nation during wartime. Therefore a movement was initiated calling for the Supreme Court to overturn its 1896 decision

Plessy v Ferguson, the ruling which permitted racial segregation. An educational movement, known as "intergroup education," emerged, whose major purpose was to reduce racial and ethnic tensions. The movement held that the teaching of factual knowledge about differing groups would foster tolerance and acceptance between these groups. Two official organizations developed to encourage this end, one (the Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools project) devoted to elementary and secondary schools, and the other (the College Study in Intergroup Relations) devoted to improving the intercultural component in teacher education programs in colleges and universities. Although these organizations failed to become fully institutionalized and lacked widespread support, we see the raising of consciousness within distinct cultures in America. The American social order had begun moving away from the assimilationist approach. Tolerance of cultural distinction--indeed, recognition of other cultures which had not even been considered as full and working segments of American society--began to replace the assimilationist ideal.

This educational and social shift continued to develop with the ascendancy of Ethnic Studies programs in the 1960s. With the identification of distinct cultures, the desire developed among minority groups to instruct in a curriculum specifically drawn from and geared to the single culture, rather than a composite "American"

experience that erased cultural identity. Ethnic studies recognized the difference between the experiences of singular cultures within the American framework. The educational system thus saw the development of separate curriculum and instructional methods geared to various ethnic groups. Rather than following a diverse approach, however, the movement tended to emphasize the ethnic contributions of each individual group without attention to the contributions of others. Curriculum became compartmentalized and separate within each ethnic studies program. Ethnic studies, therefore, represented a separatist movement which ultimately did not integrate various ethnic groups with the American social order. As Void states, the movement was neither designed to deal with the causal factors of racism and discrimination nor did the movement address issues of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism (6).

The final phase of this historical progression culminates with the current trend within the American educational system, that of multicultural education. The practical definition of multicultural education can be very different from one use to another. The most significant official document to address this issue, "No One Model American: A Statement on Multicultural Education," was adopted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in 1972 as guidance for addressing the issue (Journal of Teacher

Education 264). The statement formed the basis for the definition of multicultural education which, in 1977, entered the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (Commonly known as NCATE, this national organization accredits teacher education programs.) The basic tenets of the document advocate neither an assimilationist nor separatist model of American society but rather one of balance, where strength derives from the diversity of individual cultural units functioning within the overall social order.

The document defines multicultural education as education "which values cultural pluralism." The central meaning of cultural pluralism refers to the recognition, acceptance, and understanding of differences between cultures. The document states:

to endorse cultural pluralism is to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among the nation's citizens . . . to see these differences as a positive force in the continuing development of a society which professes a wholesome respect for the intrinsic worth of every individual . . . It is a concept that aims toward a heightened sense of being and of wholeness of the entire society based on the unique strengths of each of its parts.
(264)

Therefore cultural pluralism seeks neither to assimilate cultural differences to a central and unified society nor to create a fractured society based upon differences between groups; rather it seeks to recognize, tolerate,

and, indeed applaud the differences as a resource in the creation of a strong social order.

The document offers four thrusts which are necessary for the successful inculcation of cultural pluralism; each involves a level of tolerance and understanding which is neither assimilationist nor separatist. The first promotes the teaching of values which support cultural diversity and individual uniqueness. This would be fundamental to the course of cultural pluralism since the basis of the concept rests upon tolerance. The second suggests the integration of existing ethnic cultures into the mainstream American social, economic, and political order. This does not represent an assimilationist approach, since cultural distinctions would not vanish into the existing social order. Cultures should neither acquiesce to current American society nor exist as separate units within its boundary, but should be worked into the integral whole, which by definition, would change with this integration. The third refers to explorations in alternative and emerging lifestyles. By moving outside its existing frames, the social order can be strengthened not only through the understanding of but also through the development and identification of different cultural units. The fourth thrust encourages multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multidialectism. These practical suggestions for the educational process and the overall tone of the document indicate that society is strengthened

by a diversity that is neither assimilationist nor separatist, but rather integrated into the overall social order.

This history (and its official documents) presents a dynamic between assimilation, separation, and integration. Given this background, how has "multicultural education" actually emerged in the field of education? While the "No One Model American" statement enunciates a clear philosophy, the term "multiculturalism" shifts and varies in usage. In order to examine how the term is used, Christine Sleeter and Carl A. Grant, in their 1987 Harvard Educational Review article, "An Analysis of Multicultural Education in the United States," categorized and analyzed the meanings of the term "multicultural education" in the educational literature. Sleeter and Grant were able to identify five basic approaches to defining the concept. A brief review of their findings provides insight into the varied definition which the term possesses. Since their typologies emerge from a review of educational literature, their categories represent how the term is used in practice by a wide range of people rather than a single definition assigned by an individual.

The five categorizations are as follows:

- 1) Teaching the Culturally Different focuses upon instruction of individual cultures within the American social order. Its aim is dual: to maintain the importance

of one's own cultural identity, and to develop skills necessary for competence in the larger social structure. The approach rests upon emphasizing the value of the individual culture in order to teach the skills necessary to function within the overall social framework. The educational target is not the overall American society, but rather its singular and distinct subgroups (usually identified within the literature as African-American or ethnic as opposed to other distinct cultures). This approach consciously strives to distinguish individual cultures and to integrate them into the larger social order. Since the educational experience focuses upon the individual cultural groups, the impetus for integration must emerge from the cultural entities themselves rather than from the larger social order working to accommodate them.

2) The Human Resource approach views the purpose of multicultural education as the development of the ability of different cultural groups to communicate with one another. Rather than actively asserting assimilation, separation, or integration, the approach emphasizes the development of communication skills as a method of achieving understanding. The technique therefore emerges as value-neutral; its purpose implies that the improved skills will serve to develop tolerance and acceptance between separate cultural groups.

3) The Single Group Studies approach focuses upon curriculum and instruction which emerge from the experiences and culture of a specific group, usually based in ethnic origin rather than in "multiple forms of human diversity." The approach resembles the ethnic studies movements of the 60s, which advocated teaching and understanding of each individual group without addressing assimilation or the group's integration into the larger social order.

4) The Multicultural Education approach, by contrast, most closely matches the definition provided by the "No One Model American Statement." D.M. Gollnick's 1980 article "Multicultural Education" condenses the goals of this approach. These objectives run parallel to the goals outlined in the AACTE statement. They include the promotion of the value of cultural diversity, a respect for human rights, a valuation of alternative life choices, a call for social justice and equal opportunity for all people, and the achievement of equitable distribution of power among members of all ethnic groups (Gollnick 9). These goals are neither separatist nor assimilationist; rather, they seek to integrate diversity into the existing social order as a source of strength.

5) Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist is the final approach identified by Sleeter and Grant. Its purpose extends the goals of

Multicultural Education. The design not only seeks to develop tolerance and understanding but also takes an active stance against social problems that emerge from oppression and inequality. The approach contains direct acknowledgement of an objective beyond alteration of the formal educational system: the fostering of social change. This approach, more than others, emphasizes cultural boundaries of gender and class as well as those of ethnic origin, acknowledging and utilizing the direct link between education and social evolution. Integration into the educational system is not seen as an end in itself but rather as an active means of challenging the existing social order.

The primary conclusion one draws from these categorizations is that the term "multicultural education" does not have a singular definition. Despite a common origin, the term, in actual use, places different emphases upon assimilation, separation, and integration. Teaching the Culturally Different seeks integration with the wider social order; this integration begins with the cultural units themselves and not general society. By contrast, Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist actively seeks to challenge and change the existing social structure. The Human Resource approach does not advocate any position other than the development of communication skills. Single Group Studies suggests a clear and desired separation not only between a group

and the social order at large but also between individual cultures. Multicultural Education aligns with the principles of cultural pluralism outlined in the "No One Model American" Statement. Given the different meanings of the term "multicultural education," one can begin to understand, in part, the current educational debate; the term has no unified and mutually agreed upon definition. With these varied definitions emerge differing connotations and priorities.

As a clear example of these connotative distinctions, let us briefly examine the arguments presented in two articles, one written by Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Education, and the other by Molefi Kete Asante, Chairman of the African-American Studies Department at Temple University. Their positions represent opposing viewpoints of how multicultural education affects society. Ravitch separates the term multiculturalism into two distinct meanings. "Pluralistic" multiculturalism serves to integrate cultures by seeking "a richer common culture"; it also promotes "a broader recognition of the American culture and seeks due recognition for the ways that the nation's many racial, cultural, and ethnic groups have transformed the national culture" (276). By contrast, "particularistic" multiculturalism suggests that "no common culture is possible or desirable" (276). According to Ravitch, this form of multiculturalism is dangerous. Education

becomes an institution which will not teach skills necessary to function in society but instead will exist as a simplistic cheerleader whose main purpose is to raise the self-esteem of a particular cultural group. Personal identities become limited by an individual's cultural history and "cultural genes"; the possibility of individual achievement is defined not by one's self but by one's culture. Particularistic multiculturalism implies that separate cultures--in this article bounded by race and ethnicity--cannot and should not be part of the general American social order; it encourages a separation of cultural units which ultimately splits rather than unites American society.

For Asante (who labels Ravitch's split of the term "an oxymoron"), multiculturalism in education is integrationist; by "infusing the curriculum with an entirely new life" (268) the American social order can benefit and be strengthened by an "integrated" unification. The overall American culture will be forged from a synthesis of positive elements derived from its multiple cultures. Asante criticizes the objections of Ravitch. He outlines a clear delineation between the dominant, hegemonic order and cultural units that are not part of the social process. The ideas of "mainstream American" and "common culture" are simply tools created to maintain "the dominance and hegemony of the Eurocentric view of reality on a multicultural society" (270). For Asante,

Ravitch's objections are nothing more than self-serving statements which perpetuate the existing Eurocentric power structure.

What can be concluded from these articles? The focus, as in much of the historical background and educational literature, is upon race. Neither article relies upon empirical evidence. (Sleeter and Grant state that this is typical of the literature.) Singular anecdotes provide the source of discussion. A representative example occurs when Ravitch challenges the decision by New York State to include, in the curriculum guide for eleventh grade American history, the native American Haudenosaunee political system as a formative element in the development of the United States Constitution. This example, which is attacked by Asante, receives far more focus in their debate than the singular anecdote might suggest. The purposes of the articles are clearly rhetorical, designed to persuade rather than to evaluate an issue in a dispassionate manner. This rhetoric appears to typify the multicultural debate in the general public arena, where charges and countercharges occur without regard to an impartial evaluation of available information. The articles also come across with extraordinary personal rancor. Asante's response and Ravitch's counterresponse (a third article written as a retort to Asante) possess a tone of sarcasm and condescension which attack not only the content of the opponent's thought but also

his or her personal background. This animus not only escalates the controversy surrounding multiculturalism (the distinction between fact and personality becomes blurred) but also diminishes any attempt to reach a common understanding. Opinions appear concluded prior to any examination of arguments or evidence.

Of most importance in these essays is the continually shifting definition of the terms "culture" and "multicultural," a shift which has also been seen throughout the brief historical development and literature of multiculturalism. The terms, though explicitly defined in some cases, seem to shift according to author's rhetorical needs. If individual authors can designate different meaning to a word within their own articles, the possibility that others may understand their intentions declines. Therefore the combative tone of the articles, and the different connotations of multiculturalism, may be in part due to a linguistic misunderstanding. A common and unified definition remains elusive.

Definitions and connotations of "multicultural education" differ in both fact and perception. Does this mean there is no common understanding between and among those engaged in the debate? Throughout the historical development of the movement and in the current application of multicultural principles, a common thread does indeed exist: multicultural education is grounded in the notion of hegemony and center/margin. That is,

the concept is based upon the idea that a central and dominant "culture", usually identified as "Eurocentric," has actively oppressed the contributions of other "marginal" cultures or has disregarded them through ignorance (generated by centuries of unchallenged tradition)." Multicultural education therefore exists as an attempt to reverse this exclusion, to include in the formal educational system knowledge or perspectives that may have been absent due to Eurocentrism. Regardless of whether one perceives multicultural education as a positive or negative, hegemony and center/margin form its conceptual core.

A majority of the literature (including the articles of Ravitch and Asante) tend to address multiculturalism in terms of ethnic origin. However, given flexible boundaries, one easily may see how other marginal "cultures" may become part of the multicultural process. Educational critic Paula Rothenberg alludes to four distinct identifiable sources that serve to generate separate "cultures" for the multicultural process: ethnicity, class structure, gender, and sexual orientation. Under contemporary definitions, each of these sources can define a boundary for a separate "culture" which therefore may lay claim for inclusion in multicultural education. Furthermore, each of these sources stand in opposition to what many who advocate multicultural

education identify as the "catch-phrase" symbol of the dominant culture, the "Dead White European Male" (Berman 14).

Since education both directly and indirectly affects other social systems, the grounding of multicultural education in the notion of hegemony and center/margin extends beyond the formal educational system itself.

Rothenberg states:

By building racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class privilege into [the curricular] definition of "reality," it implies that the current distribution of wealth and power in society, as well as the current distribution of time and space in the traditional curriculum, reflects the natural order of things. (266)

The influence of multicultural education is not confined to the limited academic environment but extends into arenas of social and political power. Whether or not this "building" represents a conscious attempt by the dominant order to oppress and subvert marginal groups or whether it is unconscious (as might be generated through years of unchallenged or generally accepted positions), the fact of marginalization still remains.

The concept of discursive formation as set out by Michel Foucault illustrates this structural marginalization. For Foucault, discourse is a vehicle for the preservation of power; that is,

discourse is the governing and ordering medium of every institution. It determines what it is possible to say, what are the criteria

of truth, who is allowed to speak with authority, and where such speech can be spoken. (Selden 76)

If we accept Foucault's definition, then institutions form and control the discourse. Thus, the law has a discursive function, controlling and ordering behavior. The media has a discursive function, controlling and selecting information for public transmission, which, under Foucaultian theory, then orders patterns of thought. For Foucault, the basic function of "transmission of cultural values" would mean the transmission of values which support rather than challenge the existing patterns of power.

If we use this concept in conjunction with the belief that the educational system affects society greater than any other system, we see that attempts to foster multicultural education emerge as an attempt to control the discourse and thereby attain power within the social order. No longer does the effort affect the educational system only. By extension, all social, political, and cultural networks are affected as well. According to Selden's description of Foucault's notion of discourse, "claims to objectivity made on behalf of specific discourses are always spurious; there are no absolute true discourses, only more or less powerful ones" (78). Under this concept, the formal educational system, which mandates the participation of all members of society,

is little more than a self-perpetuation of existing power structures.

The current revisionism involving the arrival of Columbus in the "New World" provides a brief contemporary example of the concept of objectivity and power. For two centuries American schoolchildren have been taught that "Columbus discovered America." Columbus has been portrayed as a mythic hero who expanded the boundaries of the known world. Revisionist thinking portrays Columbus as an ordinary man who encountered the American continent by accident and proceeded both consciously (through slavery) and unconsciously (through disease) to ravage the Native American population. No one disputes the fact that Columbus arrived on the American continent in 1492; only the interpretation of events differ. However, since the transmitted discourse, which revisionists identify as Eurocentric, has depicted Columbus as hero figure, the existing power structure has been reinforced by an educational system which hails the white European male Columbus and ignores Native Americans.

Therefore multicultural education becomes not just an educational movement but one of social and political reform. Many who advocate multicultural education acknowledge these efforts. Jim Cummins, in his foreward to Affirming Diversity, claims that multicultural education

entails a direct challenge to the societal power structure that has historically subordinated certain groups . . . and challenges

all educators to make the schools a force
for social justice in our society. (xviii)

The title of Sleeter's anthology Empowerment through Multicultural Education provides a succinct description of her perspective: "multicultural education is an imperative dimension to empowerment, and empowerment is a fundamental goal of multicultural education" (9).

The concepts of assimilation and separation thus become essentially useless for power reform in the umbrella of the American social order. The idea of assimilation to the existing order involves clear acquiescence and consent to the hegemony; cultural distinctions would be removed in order to sustain a singular and distinct culture grounded in Western European tradition. Separation also fails to address power reform. Each singular "culture" exists within the overall frame of the American social structure; no culture could truly separate and isolate itself from existing power networks. Therefore the method of addressing power reform must emerge from a fundamental restructuring of the existing thought patterns; multicultural education seeks to accomplish this restructuring. From this alteration of discourse new social patterns will emerge which will be more accommodating to those groups who have been consigned to the margin by Eurocentric thought. Since the educational system has perhaps far greater influence upon American society than any other institution, efforts to reform

society through displacement of its power structure may perhaps be most effective if initiated in this venue.

In conclusion, education holds a central interest within the American public consciousness. Efforts at reform affect not only the institution itself but extend outward into the general American social order. The ability to conceptualize cultures using flexible boundaries creates the opportunity for multiple and alternative cultural consciousnesses. Multiculturalism taps into this awareness to create a movement in which alteration of the dominant discourses (which control and organize patterns of thought) fosters changes in economic, social, and political power.

The question that we now begin to take up is how individual plays from the contemporary American theatre address these issues.

NOTE: CHAPTER ONE

¹ The information regarding the history of education in America was taken from a series of lectures presented by Dr. S. Maxcy as part of his course "History of American Education," offered at Louisiana State University, Summer 1992.

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CHAPTER TWO
UNCOMMON WOMEN AND OTHERS: GENDER AND
THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

Uncommon Women and Others stands as playwright Wendy Wasserstein's earliest noted effort. Originally developed as a one-act play in 1975 for her graduate thesis at Yale, the expanded and revised full-length version opened at the Phoenix Theatre in New York on November 21, 1977. A subsequent television production of the play the following year, as part of the Public Broadcasting System's "Theatre in America" series, helped to establish Wasserstein as a "playwright of promise," and within 10 years more than 1000 colleges and regional theatres had performed the work (Gillespie 471). Wasserstein's reputation as a playwright advanced with the commercially successful productions of Isn't It Romantic? in 1983 and the 1989 play The Heidi Chronicles, which won both the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for Best Play. Her latest work, The Sisters Rosensweig, currently runs on Broadway.

In examining any play dealing with education and its relation to multiculturalism, we must ask what specific cultures the work seeks to identify. In Uncommon Women and Others the culture which Wasserstein most sharply delineates is a women's culture. Wasserstein projects through the work a formal educational institution reflecting the dominant social order--which she demonstrates to be male oriented--which marginalizes

women. This perspective aligns with that of many contemporary feminist theorists, such as Elaine Showalter, who cites anthropologist Edwina Ardener's concept that women exist as a "'muted group', the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group" (Showalter 471). Ultimately Wasserstein's play suggests the beginnings of change whereby women can assert their own destinies. The change does not emerge from outside the women's culture but rather from within its boundaries, implying that the process of integration with the general social order will begin within the singular cultures themselves and not by the promptings of the dominant order. Wasserstein depicts the formal educational system as irrelevant to this change.

Through what techniques does Wasserstein delineate a women's culture, and how do these techniques serve to address the multicultural principles of hegemony and center/margin? Wasserstein makes several fundamental choices in her dramatic strategies. The work is an ensemble play. The majority of the action occurs at Mount Holyoke, a women's college. No males appear on-stage. A disembodied male voice makes announcements prior to individual scenes. These choices set the boundaries for the women's culture and emphasize Wasserstein's depiction of women as marginalized.

The play focuses upon a group of characters and not a single individual. Six years after graduation, several former students of Mount Holyoke, a college for women, reunite at a restaurant and reminisce about their college years through a series of short flashback scenes. Both the opening and closing reunion scenes in the restaurant and the college flashback sequences set between them maintain equal focus among the characters. The passage of time itself rather than a central dramatic question defines the progression of the action; the flashbacks begin at the opening of a school year and progress until commencement, providing an overall temporal structure to the work as the events of the year unfold.

This choice serves to layer the play and create a texture which permits depiction of a women's culture. If culture can be defined, as Eagleton suggests, as a complex of lived manners, habits, morals and values, providing a cross-section of its inhabitants over a period of time helps permit a broad portrayal of this network of interactions. The ability to focus our attention upon the overall culture--that is, not its individual members but how it functions as a whole--is thus greatly enhanced. As Susan A. Carlson writes of the play in

Modern Drama

As they drift in and out of the play's seventeen episodes, the . . . characters set their own paces and create a dramatic forum in which

they can leisurely, continually mold, test,
and retest their lives and those of the friends.
(569)

Another method by which Wasserstein defines a women's culture involves setting the majority of the play's action (the flashback sequences) at Mount Holyoke, a factual college which excludes men. The school, originally founded in 1837 by Mary Lyons as Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, became chartered as a full college in 1888. Mount Holyoke is one of the "Seven Sister" schools, a loose confederation of women's colleges which organized in 1915 as the Four College Conference, including, at the time, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley. (Later Barnard, Bryn Mawr, and Radcliffe joined the Conference.) The Conference was formed to share common experiences and problems unique to women's colleges; over the years it also included more formal activities, such as the collective search for endowment funds in 1927 by the heads of the colleges, or cooperative admissions programs (Baker 2). At the present time two of the colleges (Vassar and Radcliffe) have become coeducational, with the others remaining strictly female.

Wasserstein's selection of a known college reinforces the sense of tradition and how it grounds the opposition between the dominant social order and the marginal culture of women. Mount Holyoke, a historical entity, possesses a long and established tradition of gender separation. This separation did not originate in the multicultural

notion which views separatism as a positive method for curriculum and instruction in one's individual culture; rather the separation essentially served to preserve the status quo. As an example, the chief benefactor of Vassar, Matthew Vassar, originally intended to endow a local hospital, but instead was persuaded to "finance a college 'for young women which shall be to them what Yale and Harvard are to young men' " (Baker 5). His statement implies both the impossibility and undesirability of women and men achieving educational equality in the same setting. As historian Mabel Newcomer writes of the 1830's, a

woman's right to knowledge . . . was not yet accepted. This was a male prerogative, and only when men deemed it safe--that is, that it would neither kill the women or seriously impair their attractiveness and usefulness to men--was the right reluctantly extended to all human beings. (1)

Women's scholar Livy Baker analyzes the Seven Sister colleges and finds that rather than fostering independence of thought the institutions became "educational wallflowers." Though offering the standard curriculum of the male institutions, they maintained the stability of the traditional social order (11). Education, despite being offered to women, was irrelevant in terms of a female's social or economic autonomy: "the women's colleges would provide educated wives but not professional competition" for the men (Baker 11).

The historical framework of women's education reinforces the contemporary feminist notion that the existing social order marginalizes women and limits their life options. Mabel Newcomber cites three original oppositions to the development of women's colleges: women were intellectually inferior to men and could not be educated (26); women could not handle the physical rigors involved in obtaining higher education (28); education would reduce both the number of marriages and size of families (30). Many feminist theorists, such as Susan Stanford Friedman or Sandra M. Gilbert, argue that these objections--intellectual inferiority, lack of physical ability, and a possible change in family structure--extend beyond the educational framework to rationalize the continued marginalization of women in contemporary American society.

Not only did the educational institutions themselves, by their intrinsic separatist structure, isolate women, the curriculum and focus of the educational process reinforced the marginalization. Many of the women's institutions, including Mount Holyoke, were founded in order to train teachers, an occupation which remains associated with and "acceptable" for women yet carries little social or economic prestige. As Esther Manning Westervelt points out:

it was advantageous to train women as teachers because women accepted salaries at less than half the level demanded by men . . . in an

expanding economy oriented far more to production than to service, teaching the young was not a career to attract many able men. It was one of the few employment opportunities open to women. (298)

The tradition of the women's institution created a "positive feedback" loop in which cause and effect reinforced themselves. Women were marginalized because of attendance at the institutions, and attendance at the institutions occurred because the women were marginalized.

The process of education portrayed by Wasserstein reinforces how the educational system maintains the existing social structure. The flashback sequences depict only social or non-formal interactions and do not depict what would be considered intellectual activity. There is little sense of curriculum or formal educational development throughout the play; other than an occasional mention of a book or a literary figure, we do not see the build-up of academic skills or the acquisition of knowledge which might permit greater opportunities for women. While the male announcements designate specific functions assigned to the education of women, Wasserstein depicts neither mental engagement nor a formal learning process but rather an almost haphazard progression of women discovering themselves in their own fashion. Specific instruction within the formal educational system is demonstrated as irrelevant and absent from the stage; the only official representative of the system is Miss

Plumm, the housemother. The formal educational process has little impact upon the women's dialogue and, by extension, little implication for their lives as a whole.

Two recent trends within women's education must be noted. Most women today attend colleges which are coeducational. Therefore the women's college exists as a vestige of tradition which is slowly being dissolved or altered in form. Second, while the concept of a separate education for women originated to preserve the existing order, the recent trend is to view women's colleges as necessary for the preservation and enhancement of the culture of women. An increased emphasis is being placed upon the need for women's colleges to refrain from coeducational status, based upon the idea that women are better educated in an environment in which women and women's issues are emphasized. As Westervelt writes:

Supporters of women's colleges would have been encouraged by [recommendations] that women's colleges weigh any proposed change to coeducation with great caution in view of both of the unique educational advantages such institutions appear to offer young women and of the superior achievements of their graduates. (308)

When women's colleges decide to become coeducational (frequently for financial reasons), an outcry emerges from students and alumnae who do not wish to see integration occur. For example, in 1990, Mills College of California retreated from an attempt to accept men due to this pressure. The objections derive from the

fear that the general social order will impinge upon the commitment to women which their college possesses. It is believed that the direct infusion of men into the women's educational system will undermine the unique venue in which women learn, negating the enhancement of female cultural consciousness through elimination of the institutional sexual boundary. This argument appears to suggest a circular logic; if women choose to remain isolated, they can never achieve integration into the system, yet if women never integrate into the system, they will always remain marginalized.

The fact that no men appear on stage reinforces both the cultural boundary of women and the male influence of the wider social structure. The absence creates an illusion which suggests that males do not center the action. However, within the play the male influence permeates the environment. The unseen male voice, which makes announcements prior to scenes, literally and metaphorically dominates and structures the action while punctuating thematic concerns. Wasserstein implies that a male authority controls the action despite its lack of direct involvement. In addition, the text reveals that males emerge as a vital force within the lives of the women; men are evaluated as sexual partners, economic providers, and possible husbands. The lack of physical male characters merely serves as an ironic

strategy to underscore the omnipresent social presence of the male.

Wasserstein's choice to show no males in either the restaurant or the flashback sequences suggests a continuity of domination in the social order. The fact that both the restaurant and the educational institution evince the same pattern of unseen dominance suggests little difference between the educational environment and contexts external to the institution. The relations and structures both within and outside the institution reinforce each other in a self-perpetuating dynamic. However, as we will see later, Wasserstein utilizes several elements which clearly indicate that this pattern may be changing.

A singular moment exists in the play when the male presence is more apparent. Wasserstein's development of this scene and its placement at the beginning of Act Two reinforce the marginalization dynamic between the dominant order and women. The occasion is a Father-Daughter weekend. The fathers are off-stage; the daughters (on-stage) perform a song for them. This performance confirms the voyeuristic structures identified in male-female interplay. Laura Mulvey has brought much attention to the "male gaze," in which "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female"; as a consequence, "in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at

and displayed" (Mulvey 436). The fact that the fathers are off-stage reinforces the unseen male dominance which is presented throughout the text. The concept of the father (in opposition to "daughter") not only underscores sexual differentiation but bespeaks the traditional powers of a patriarchal social order. Many feminists argue that this differential is not natural but rather an artificial construct designed to preserve the status quo. Feminist critic Hélène Cixous observes:

Man/Woman automatically means great/small, superior/inferior . . . high or low . . . (all discourse) is all ordered around heirarchical oppositions that came back to the man/woman opposition, an opposition that can only be sustained by means of a difference posed by cultural discourse as 'natural.' (482).

In short, cultural traditions masquerade as natural patterns. An argument for multicultural education suggests that such seemingly "natural" relations are indeed arbitrary constructs which, as Rothenberg has stated, are "built" into social structures yet have specious legitimacy.

Furthermore, the fact that this voyeuristic performance occurs as part of an official Mount Holyoke function suggests that the male/female opposition is engrained in the institution of education as well as the social order at large. Education affects and reflects society. This occasion both reinforces and perpetuates continuation of female marginalization beyond the borders

of the school. The "daughters" sing a traditional song ("Saving Ourselves for Yale") which is clearly designed to be cute without being offensive. Within the piece, sexuality is approached in a coy manner, one that does not reflect the frank and candid discussions of sex seen among the women in the first act. This performance sequence implies that not only do the marginalized women perform for the male oriented dominant order, they perform in unison and in a manner which does not reflect their inner perspectives and opinions. By placing this sequence at the beginning of Act Two, Wassserstein reinforces how females are assigned to the margin and how these particular women, seen in Act One as expressive and candid, submerge their attitudes when placed in a situation of public performance. The brief exchanges which occur in the sequence illustrate this private/performance split; when the women address each other, their side comments are quite pointed and direct: "I slept with a Whiffenpoof at the Taft Hotel" (35) When addressing their fathers, their utterances are standard and traditional: "Hi, Daddy!".

The disembodied male voice which provides announcements prior to most scenes (both restaurant sequences and the flashbacks) continues to highlight the interaction between the dominant order and the marginalized women's culture. This dramatic strategy serves several functions. The voice cues the audience to the subject matter of

the scenes which follow and highlights thematic considerations; the structure of the play is thus unified through a topical progression of announcement and scene. The voice provides temporal structure, indicating the sequence of events which begins at orientation, progresses through a series of activities within the year, and concludes with commencement. Without the voice the play would have less forward momentum. The scenes would lose some of their sharp topical focus. The voice represents a governing or controlling force for the dramatic performance itself. The sense of an unseen male hegemony is reinforced, since Wasserstein creates a drama in which all characters are female, while a male voice orchestrates and organizes the action.

The impact of male hegemony in the play increases as one examines the content of the announcements and the subsequent scenes. The announcements address educational issues for women in a concise and factual manner. The sense of fact is accentuated when one recognizes that Wasserstein paraphrases or directly quotes from the Mount Holyoke College Bulletin of 1966-67 and the inaugural address of school president Richard Glenn Gettrell on November 2, 1957 (Wasserstein 2). The content has not been invented by Wasserstein as simple artistic license but instead is based upon actual documents. When juxtaposed with the scenes, the announcements demonstrate how the male voice is at best

naive and at worst wrong in its understanding of females in the educational and social context. The announcements serve as ironic underpinning for the scenes, revealing how the approach and responses of the female differ from what the dominant male version suggests.

Act One, Scene Seven serves as an example of how the scenes work as counterpoint to the announcements.

The announcer's voice states:

Am I saying anatomy is destiny? No, it is not destiny. Providing a setting in which these subtle constraints may be overcome is particularly the mission of a college for women. (26)

The announcement presents itself as clear and factual without margin for debate or misinterpretation. Anatomy is not destiny; it is, rather, a "subtle constraint" against which the formal educational institution must work. The statement therefore implies a distinction between the missions of educational institutions for men and women. For men, education serves to develop the skills of leadership, knowledge, and power. Most often all-male institutions are associated directly or indirectly with military or religious functions, indicating the institutional role of training men for powerful positions within the social order. As Kate Millett states in Sexual Politics, "the exclusive dominance of males in the more prestigious fields directly serves the interests of patriarchal power in industry, government, and the military" (42). In the announcement the function

assigned to the educational mission of a college for women is less assertive--the overcoming of subtle constraints. Therefore we see the dichotomy between educational institutions for males and those for females; education for women seeks merely to neutralize anatomical differences. Women thus do not obtain the education necessary to alter the social order, and the social order in turn perpetuates this limiting education. A self-affirming cycle continues.

The dramatic interplay which follows this announcement, however, undercuts the statement in several ways. The initial image of Holly filling up a diaphragm with orthocrema clearly establishes the sexual differentiation between man and woman. It is a visual sign that, indeed, anatomy is destiny. When Holly states, "I don't want to bud," she demonstrates her self-awareness that as a woman she can become pregnant, an anatomical "destiny" a man cannot experience. The women throughout exhibit a keen knowledge of anatomical differences, particularly in relation to sexual activity. Furthermore, the anatomical difference is not merely biological. Rita declares that "this entire society is based on cocks" and then proceeds to provide elaborate descriptions of how both physical and social environments are based upon the male phallic model (28). When she states that "it's easy to feel alienated and alone for the simple reason I've never been included because I came into

the world without a penis" (28), she exemplifies how the physical difference between man and woman manifests itself in the social order.

Wasserstein nonetheless also displays the connection between physical and social destiny as arbitrary. Physical anatomy does indeed control destiny; some biological differences (such as the ability to become pregnant) between men and women cannot be altered. However, the fact that physical anatomy leads to a dominance in the social order is not automatic and intrinsic to nature. Feminist theorists clearly support this concept. Millett explicitly calls for distinction between "sex" and "gender." She cites the work of Robert Stoller:

Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and 'female' the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex. (Millett 30)

Therefore, when Rita claims "everything I can name is male" she suggests that the existing social order--which marginalizes women both as individuals and as a culture--is based upon what Millett would define as gender distinctions, which are arbitrary and artificial, rather than sexual distinctions, which are grounded in biological fact. The entire social order, based upon masculine structure, acts to suppress women and their culture. Therefore the announcement is shown to be simplistic, failing to understand both anatomical facts and their

social implication in women's lives. Anatomy is far more complex than the facile term "subtle constraint" would suggest.

Wasserstein does not always give explicit focus to sexual and gender distinctions in undercutting the announcements; however, the sense of gender differentiation between men and women is always present, implicit in the fact that the action occurs in a women's college (which creates the distinctive boundary of a women's cultural unit) and the overall depiction of women as marginalized. Act Two, Scene Five demonstrates how Wasserstein undercuts the announcements without explicit reference to gender. The man's voice prior to the scene states:

a liberal education opens out in many different directions; when intellectual experience is a real adventure, it leads toward the unfamiliar. Students at the college are expected to encounter a wide range of opportunities - that is to say, uncertainties. A maturing mind must have an ethical base, a set of values, and wonder at the unknown. (40)

The statement suggests a liberal and open approach to the education of women, stated with authority and comprehension. The subsequent scene, however, opens with the students sitting in the dorm living room eating peanut butter crackers and licking marshmallow fluff from their fingers. Before any words are spoken, the image serves as sharp juxtaposition to the "maturing mind" advocated by the voice. The dialogue of the scene

enhances this contrast. The initial conversation, focused upon Merv Griffin, demonstrates a surface sense of triviality with runs contrary to the values espoused by the announcement. Samantha's gleeful entrance announcing her engagement--marriage being a traditional institution which does not necessarily connote a "wide range of opportunity"--provides irony to the staid tone of the male voice. The fact that the final moments of the scene suggest Carter as an apparent bulimic (bulimia being a disease usually associated with women) also serves to undercut the preceding statement. Wasserstein never explicitly addresses gender distinction within the scene, though these distinctions are implicit within the established setting and action.

The announcements also reinforce the concept that the male order dominates not through conscious effort but rather through tradition. At no time does the play depict any conscious effort to suppress the women's culture. The announcements do not aim to assert dominance in any malignant fashion; their misunderstanding of the female perspective emerges from traditional values and an ingrained lack of awareness. The Father-Daughter weekend certainly does not represent a conscious effort by the fathers to suppress their daughters; the weekend and its rituals emerge from an unchallenged institutional tradition. Rita's lament that the entire society is based upon phallic symbols displays her awareness of

female subordination but indicates no belief in an active conspiracy. The idea of a subtle or unconscious dominance is evident in the works of many feminist theorists, such as Millett or Josephine Donovan, who argue that the marginalization of women no longer derives from active attempts at repression but through a series of patriarchal (male-dominated) ideologies which have engrained themselves in the social order through generations. As Donovan cites Millett, "All historical civilizations are patriarchies; their ideology is male supremacy" (Donovan 145). Therefore oppression and marginalization need no conscious efforts. The suppression of other cultures exists as part of the social system which, if unchallenged, will continue marginalization. Wasserstein portrays an order which exhibits no intended domination but which, lacking self-awareness of the fact, dominates just the same.

Wasserstein depicts a central male order which places the culture of women on the margin. If one of the functions often assigned to multicultural education is the centering of marginalized cultures, how does the female culture begin to make its presence felt within the dominant social order? For Wasserstein, the change which emerges is not a radical shift of power structures but rather a slow evolution in the general social pattern. The play employs techniques to demonstrate this alteration, which eventually (though not as of yet) may shift the

social order from one of male dominance to one in which women are integrated within the overall social system and therefore are granted voice, power, and agency. We do not see a conscious desire for separation between the existing social order and the female culture nor an abrupt shift to full integration, but rather a process by which tradition, and hence the social order, is slowly modified.

The physical scenic connection between the college and the restaurant demonstrates the linkage between the past and present. As Wasserstein states, "the restaurant in the present becomes the college living room" (8). Multiple sets are not used for the restaurant and college sequences; the restaurant evolves into the collegiate setting and then changes back for the final sequence. This subtle physical change between the college (the past) and the restaurant (the present) suggests a thematic link between the educational experience and the present; changes occur slowly in an evolutionary fashion. No revolutionary or radical break is depicted. While the basic essence of the set (and hence, by metaphor, the social order) remains intact, in fact some change occurs.

The function of the restaurant sequences demonstrates this evolutionary change. The opening and closing scenes not only provide a frame to the flashbacks but also indicate the futures of the characters. Since the play

begins in the restaurant, we know nothing of the characters in their college life; we therefore evaluate the individuals through their present-day interactions. By the closing sequence, however, we have seen the women both in past and present. We find that the individuals have not significantly changed. The characteristics which defined them in college continue to do so in their present lives. For example, Rita retains the same brash attitude toward life and sex which she possessed at Mount Holyoke; Samanatha retains a strong sense of traditional values. This suggests that characters, attitudes, and social values are rather inflexible and that the formal educational system, as a product of an existing order, does not enhance change but continues to marginalize women. In this light, education does not promote opportunity but rather reaffirms the existing social structures.

This continuity of personal characteristics appears to suggest that little has changed. However, Wasserstein's decision to remove selected characters (who appeared in the flashback sequences but do not appear in the restaurant) indicates a shift within the educational and social systems. The implication is that women may be slowly emerging from their marginalization. The four who do not appear in the restaurant are Miss Plumm, Susie Friend, Leilah, and Carter. These characters can be seen to represent ends of an educational and cultural

continuum, with Miss Plumm and Susie Friend as traditionalists and Leilah and Carter as non-traditionalists. The remainder (the characters who reunite) form the center of the continuum.

The absence of both Miss Plumm and Susie Friend suggests the decline of the established order. Miss Plumm does not appear in the restaurant sequence. It is logical that she would not be invited to a gathering of college classmates who are not her peers. Nevertheless her absence suggests the erosion of a traditional order which has long been dominant. Miss Plumm was herself a woman who endorsed the discourse of an educational system which acted for the marginalization of women; as housemother, she served as official representative of the institution and organized many of the social functions which were designed to influence the lives of the students. Her removal from the system suggests that at last the women have begun to free themselves from her oversight and the values she represented. No one would suggest that Miss Plumm had consciously acted as an agent for the marginalization of women. However, regardless of the good faith motive, her speech and actions perpetuated the conventional structure. Now she is absent from the system.

Wasserstein's sense of change is reinforced by Miss Plumm herself. When the girls see Miss Plumm for the final time at commencement, she proceeds to take

control of her own destiny. She has elected to retire from the college. The change in her life comes from within, not from external influence. This internal change is emphasized by her decision to go bird shooting with her long time friend Ada Greer. Years earlier she wanted to go with Ada; instead of fulfilling this desire, she, being a "dutiful daughter," acquiesced to her father's wishes and married Hoyt Plumm (37), conceding to the dominant tradition of both father as authority figure and marriage as institution. Now she forgoes the traditional values of the social order to seek fulfillment on her own terms. Her statement "I do not fear change for my girls, nor myself" (51), indicates a willingness to move beyond traditional boundaries. Change, we see, is possible.

The absence of Susie Friend from the present-day reunion reinforces this sense of evolution. If Miss Plumm is an older representative of the traditional order, Susie Friend represents a younger version, committed throughout the college years to "gracious living" and adherence to social tradition. Part cheerleader, part sorority sister, she embodies the traditions of collegiate life and hence, by implication, emerges as the woman interested in social affairs and responsibilities--what Barbara M. Brenzel labels as the traditionally perceived "cultural norm" of women as "social saviors guarding home, health, and family morality" (197). Throughout

the play her conversations do not reveal the personal intimacy or emotion of the other women. She focuses upon the surface aspects of the collegiate experience. She is mocked in the opening restaurant sequence for her total commitment to social affairs. Her destiny does not concern the reuniting women, and her absence suggests change. Nonetheless, Susie Friend, like Miss Plumm, exhibits a hint of internal modification. In the commencement scene, when asked about her future plans, she states that she is becoming a security analyst. This choice of occupation certainly does not align with the traditional values and perspectives she embraces in the play. The absence of Miss Plumm and Susie Friend from the restaurant indicate a decline in the older order and the traditional dominant value system. We find hints of evolution within these traditional characters, suggesting the position of women is being slowly altered.

At the opposite end of the social and educational continuum are Carter and Leilah, both of whom (like Miss Plumm and Susie Friend) appear in the flashbacks but not in the present. In the college sequences these women differ from the other students and exist outside the traditional parameters of the women's culture established by Wasserstein. Carter is exceptionally quiet and considered odd by her classmates; we discover little about her background or emotions. Her future

(revealed in the closing restaurant sequence) finds her making a film on Wittgenstein for public television. This pursuit not only aligns with her depiction during college life but breaks the traditional roles to which women have been assigned. Similarly Leilah creates an unique destiny for herself; she marries an archeologist and converts to Islam. Her character is perhaps the most idiosyncratic of the class. A constant reader, she does not interact with others on an emotional or personal level. Therefore, the two extremes of the continuum are not included in the reunion. Miss Plumm and Susie Friend, representatives of the traditional order, vanish under circumstances which suggest change, while Leilah and Carter, at the opposite end of the continuum, create their own destinies, moving beyond the cultural boundaries to include opportunities which were never offered at Mount Holyoke or in the traditional social order.

Not only do Carter and Leilah create their own destinies, they do so in distinctive and opposite fashions. Carter asserts an independence through her film. She examines a topic outside mainstream boundaries (the non-commercial nature of public television reinforces this independence), while Leilah ironically asserts her destiny through the traditional institution of marriage and entrance into a religion and social order which is male dominant. (As Muffett states "she can never

be divorced" [52].) Both choices show a break with the traditional value system and demonstrate new options in women's decision-making. One can note that Carter and Leilah are still remembered with some fondness by the reuniting group, while Susie Friend and Miss Plumm exist as objects of derision.

Wasserstein indicates a clear sense of female advancement in the final flashback sequence set during commencement. We observe the decision to end the practice of "gracious living." A term used to describe a specific set of social activities and practices present in the female educational institution, "gracious living" was distinguished, according to Livy Baker, by

middle class social customs, from modulated voices to after-dinner demitasse, which the parents of daughters had come to expect from educational institutions, confusing as they sometimes did the responsibilities of the liberal arts college with those of the finishing school. (83)

The various social activities, such as afternoon teas and "milk-and-crackers," and the social nature of Miss Plumm and Susie Friend capture the essence of "gracious living." Yet Wasserstein portrays this model as a set of irrelevant social customs, a code of conduct derided by the women both in the present and the past.

During the commencement scene it is revealed that "gracious living" has been abolished by student vote. Its elimination from the formal educational system continues to reinforce Wasserstein's premise of a

progressive change in the social order. The fact that the termination was effected by a student vote and not an external mandate suggests that women now possess some control over their own educational, and by extension, cultural destiny; they exercise this control by abolishing a practice which has been demonstrated unnecessary and restrictive. Just as Miss Plumm, Susie, Leilah, and Carter have assumed control over their own personal lives, so too do the women of the college begin to assert their own control.

Wasserstein provides further evidence for the decline in tradition. "Commencement" marks both the end of the educational experience and the beginning of new life; this metaphor coincides with the erosion of the old order (demonstrated by Miss Plumm's retirement and the end of gracious living) and the emergence of a new one holding more opportunities for women. The list of endeavours which the students will pursue after commencement contrasts with traditional expectations. The pre-scene announcement has spoken of "the varied opportunities" which follow graduation. The voice adds, "by the time a class has been out ten years, more than nine-tenths of its members are married and many of them devote a number of years exclusively to bringing up a family" (50). This statement indicates that though the educational system may have a temporary, brief liberating impact upon graduates, they mostly return

to traditional domestic roles. The voice notes that "today all fields are open to women" and that "nearly all graduates find jobs or continue studying"; however, as it continues: "anyone of a variety of majors may lead to a position as Girl Friday for an Eastern Senator, service volunteer in Venezuela, or assistant sales director for Reader's Digest." These occupations clearly represent stereotyped service roles for females. As Millett observes

educational institutions, segregated or co-educational, accept a cultural programming toward the generally operative division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' subject matter, assigning the humanities and certain social sciences (at least in their lower or marginal branches) to the female - and science and technology, the professions, business and engineering to the male. Of course the balance of employment, prestige, and reward . . . lie with the latter. (42)

Despite the common notion that education may lead to a more fulfilling life, the voice evokes the dominant order and its constrictions upon women (even those with education), forwarding the impression that formal education neither liberates nor alters the female experience but rather continues the restrictive pattern of the dominant order.

However, the plans and activities which the women will pursue after graduation do not align with the viewpoint of the male voice. Kate will start Harvard Law School in the fall. Leilah will study archeology in Mesopotamia. Susie Friend, despite her acquiescence to tradition within the play, will become a security

analyst. Samantha will marry and fulfill a traditional role. The futures of Holly, Muffet, and Rita are unresolved. These courses are not the traditional ones assigned to women by the male voice; their choices range across a wide spectrum, from the tradition of marriage to entrance into a fortress of institutional hegemony (Harvard Law School). We see that women who now emerge from the college are beginning to redefine the boundary of opportunities.

Wasserstein's notion of progressive social change is confirmed in the announcement just prior to the closing restaurant scene. Of most importance is the fact the man's voice fades into a woman's voice. For the first time in an announcement a woman articulates her own position. The words reflect a feminine perspective, not a masculine one:

Women still encounter overwhelming obstacles to achievement and recognition despite gradual abolition of legal and political disabilities. Society has trained women from childhood to accept a limited set of options and restricted levels of aspirations. (52)

The male voice, through the course of the play, has been consistently proven false or mistaken. Here, the woman speaks for herself.

This sense of change is also buoyed by the concluding restaurant scene. Each woman to a large degree fulfills a personal destiny that is of her own choosing and not

fully scripted by the dominant social order. For example, Muffet supports herself through the insurance business. Samantha is going to have a child. Kate has left her male companion; she decided to commit herself to career rather than become a "Donna Reed" figure for her husband (53).

The sense of balance Wasserstein creates here is important. We see not only women who need to work outside traditional social roles in order to find fulfillment, but also women, such as Samantha, who can be happy within the conventional institutions. By concluding in this fashion, Wasserstein does not deduce that women can only achieve contentment when freed from traditional roles; she suggests that choices should be possible. The play takes no strident stand against the existing social order and traditions as wrong in and of themselves, but wrong because they limit women's options. Wasserstein thus promotes diversity of choice. By slowly integrating and merging with the dominant social order (and thereby altering it), women, in order to achieve personal fulfillment, will have options may or may not run against tradition.

What may we conclude about the formal educational system and multiculturalism? In Wasserstein's play, the social order affects the educational institution more than the institution affects the social order. This principle counters some definitions of multicultural

education which suggest education as a means to effect social change. The institution is demonstrated as irrelevant to the concerns, needs and desires of women; it functions for continued dominance, not liberation. Does this suggest that Wasserstein advocates an overhaul of the educational system? Despite the fact that the depicted educational institution acts for continued marginalization, Wasserstein does indeed depict the women's order as changing. This change emerges from within the women themselves, not mandated from an external source. Therefore, women are beginning to succeed despite the educational system; while the system may inhibit progress, it does not stop it.

The above perspective indicates a paradox within the multicultural argument, one which Wasserstein's play fails to address. The multicultural perspective is designed to center those groups--in this case women--who traditionally have been assigned to the margin. How do these groups develop or maintain cultural consciousness if they are integrated into the social order? Would the assertion of independence begin if women were integrated with the general social order, which has been traditionally male dominant? Wasserstein does not address the issue of whether or not the isolation of women through this collegiate environment enhances their cultural development (which would be more difficult within a coeducational institution). Therefore, if

the fundamental desire is to integrate women into the general social order, is Mount Holyoke a positive or negative? Wasserstein ultimately suggests its irrelevancy. Since change is already occurring, no alteration in the formal educational system may be necessary. Societal limitations may be overcome regardless of any structural changes. For many who advocate multicultural education, Wasserstein's final view may appear negative. It suggests that, despite any inherent structural limitations of the educational system, individuals within marginalized groups may demarginalize themselves through conscious and determined effort. Such an interpretation begins to undermine a principle of the multicultural argument which places social structures as an important factor in the continued marginalization of cultures.

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CHAPTER THREE
OPEN ADMISSIONS: RACE, CLASS, AND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Wasserstein's work concentrates upon gender as the factor which generates a marginal cultural unit. Shirley Lauro's two versions of Open Admissions focus upon race and class as sources for marginalization. The 1981 one-act play, originally performed Off-Broadway at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, depicts a brief and intense confrontation between Alice Stockwell, a speech teacher at a city college in New York City, and Calvin Jefferson, a poor African-American student, over a grade he has received. The full-length version, which opened on Broadway in January of 1984, includes the confrontation sequence (which Lauro splits into two separate segments) and scenes involving the daily activities of Ginny (the teacher, whose name Lauro changes) and Calvin. The two principal characters interact with others in the educational setting as well as with family members at home. In both works Lauro (who herself was a teacher for seven years at the City College of New York) depicts the failure of a specific formal educational policy--open admissions--which, though claiming to provide opportunity and the possibility of upward mobility for members of marginalized cultures, only serves to perpetuate existing racial and economic disadvantage. Reviews of the full length production generally praised the validity of

the play's content while denouncing its expansion. The commentary of Clive Barnes is typical:

The subject of subeducation with inferior verbal skills is vital, and is a problem that tends to be too easily brushed behind the blackboard. In Miss Lauro's original play it emerged with both passion and poignancy. [These] are still to be fleetingly found in this new, stretched version of the play. But Open Admissions is the thinner for its stretching. (383)

In Calvin we see both race and poverty as generative causes of marginalization. Whether or not race predicates class distinction or whether the two exist as independent functions is a matter of debate. Sociologist Charles Sackrey, for example, contends that class is the primary factor in generating cultural units. The poor, regardless of ethnic background, have their own "particular ethos, a considerable range of behavioral characteristics displayed by its members which makes their plight insensitive to most antipoverty measures" (Sackrey 54). For Sackrey, race is irrelevant as a causal factor in economic marginalization. Social scientist Peter J. Kellogg suggests that

the emphasis on conflicts between the claims of race and ethnicity has tended to obscure more basic issues of class and democracy which must be addressed before the problems of either Afro-Americans or white ethnic groups can be resolved. (121)

Other scholars, such as John W. Work, conversely hold that racism does create economic marginalization. As Work states, "systemic racism . . . is at the center

of black/white employment relations" (Work 12). In support of this view, John C. Livingston, in Fair Game? Inequality and Affirmative Action, writes:

It is still absurd to believe--as the American consensus still appears to hold--that nonwhites have equal opportunity to attain those positions in life to which individual ability and character entitle them. (75)

Lauro establishes Calvin as a member of both groups; her dramatic strategies, however, generate different emphases within each work. The one-act play, through its unified action, accentuates the racial focus of Calvin's marginalization. The full-length work, through its depiction of the family unit and the surrounding environment, shifts attention to economic determinants. Both plays, in short, reveal Calvin as marginalized due to two overlapping factors.

Although Lauro's plays invoke several broad concepts underlying education, they specifically address the policy of open admissions as applied in the City University of New York (CUNY). A brief overview of the policy is necessary for one to understand Lauro's perception that the educational system offers false hope without actual change. Open admissions refers to the educational policy by which a state-funded public college or university offers admittance to any individual who has a valid high school degree conferred within that state. The policy obviously differs from the admissions practices of most public and private colleges, which selectively

admit students through evaluating criteria such as SAT scores or grade point average.

Open admissions directs us toward two views of the educational process, as outlined in Right Vs. Privilege (an analysis of the open admissions policy of the City University of New York). The first perspective accounts for the rationale behind the development of the open admissions policy in New York City, while the second explains the failure of the program that Lauro observes in her plays. The first perspective "emphasizes education's role in promoting equality of opportunity, in loosening the linkage between the status of the family into which a person is born and that person's own adult status" (Lavin 275). Education provides individuals access to knowledge and skills necessary to function in a complex industrial society. The integration of multiple cultures into the general social order will occur with continued education, since merit and competency determine occupational roles (and hence economic and social status) rather than ethnic group or social class. The second perspective suggests that educational achievement is irrelevant to future success. The educational system processes students

in different ways according to their social origins and specifically by channeling students from lower status ethnic and class groups away from the educational experiences providing the greatest leverage for adult success. (Lavin 275)

According to this perspective, the policy of open admissions merely reorganizes the existing educational structure, assigning marginal groups to "lower track" educational institutions.

The most prominent reason for the development of open admissions in New York City, according to Lavin, can be attributed to the rise of ethnic consciousness during the 1960s. In particular, black and Puerto Rican students were developing cultural awareness and hence began to demand equal representation within the university system. (The terms "black" and "Puerto Rican," generally not in use today, were common during the period.) In February 1969, a student group known as the Committee of Ten presented CUNY officials with a list of demands which "became the agenda for negotiations in the confrontation that was to come" (Lavin 10). These demands were divided between what would be considered separatist and integrationist models. Two of the demands were separatist: that the university create distinct schools of Black and Puerto Rican studies and that an exclusive orientation program for black and Puerto Rican freshmen be inaugurated. Two other demands leaned toward an integrational approach: that the racial composition of the CUNY student body reflect the black and Puerto Rican population of New York City high schools, and that black and Puerto Rican history and the Spanish language be required for all education majors. While

the first two demands acknowledged a desire for separate cultural education, the second two sought a full integration into the existing system changing the composition of the student body and, in Asante's words, "infusing the curriculum with new life" (268). These issues continue to drive the current multicultural debate; the Single Group Studies approach, identified in Chapter One, suggests that selected groups need a distinct educational agenda geared to their own particular needs.

A recent practical example of this approach is seen in the fall 1992 opening of Malcolm X Academy, one of three public elementary schools in Detroit created, according to The New York Times, as "educational alternatives for urban black boys" to teach "an African-centered curriculum that emphasizes black achievements" ("Whites in Detroit: B6). Though the school is a public "school of choice" to which any parent in the city of Detroit may send their children, as of December 2, 1992, only 1 of 470 students was white. That this educational approach generated different responses is not surprising. Deborah McGriff, the Detroit superintendent of schools, stated:

As a school district we are committed to African-centered education, not only in the academies, but to infuse African-centered concepts across the entire curriculum. (B6)

Yet, as opposition leader Wayne Earheart commented, "I don't think it is any place for a white kid to go

to school . . . they teach the kids that blackness is the center of the universe" (B6).

At CUNY, a series of demonstrations emerged from the student demands and subsequent university responses. Students and police engaged in escalating incidents of violence which caused physical damage to the university, the most noted being the burning of the auditorium at the City College center on May 8, 1969. These events proved the direct catalyst for the institution's adoption of the policy of open admissions. Given the violence of the demonstrations, the continuance of the existing admissions system was deemed impossible to maintain. As Lavin states, these demonstrations did not strictly occur along racial or ethnic lines; some white students supported the minority demands. Therefore the movement could not be categorized as that of a separatist agenda supported only by single and self-interested ethnic units. At the time, CUNY, being funded through state and local budgets, did not charge tuition. It was generally agreed that an open admissions policy would not only benefit specific ethnic groups but any individual of a lower class.

Therefore the open admissions plan at CUNY was adopted in July 1969 by the Board of Higher Education for New York City. Enacted in the fall semester of 1970, over thirty-five thousand students entered the City University system, a 75 per cent increase over

the previous year (Lavin 19). Policies were implemented to encourage student success. Remedial and support services were mandated for all students who needed them. No students could be dismissed for academic reasons during their freshman year. Unlike other open admissions systems, where freshman courses are designed to be difficult and thus "weed out" students, CUNY took an active approach to encouraging student success.

Against this historical background in New York City, Lauro's one-act play depicts the failure of open admissions to educate or to integrate members of ethnic cultures to the general social order. Lauro's added material in the full-length version reinforces this sense of failure and further accentuates the concept of class as a source of marginalization. In both plays Lauro presents an educational system that marginalizes not only minority individuals and their cultures but also representatives of the educational system--in this case, the teacher character. Alice feels betrayed by the educational system as Calvin feels betrayed by Alice. She acts as a disinterested participant in the continuance of the social structure that does not meet or fulfill her personal expectations. In sum, the educational system, despite its claims of providing opportunity, reinforces the existing racial and class hierarchies.

The one-act play, which depicts a confrontation between Calvin and Alice in the professor's office,

demonstrates how the formal educational system fails to serve ethnic and lower class cultures. The initial moments find Calvin requesting information about the grade of "B" he received on his Shakespeare presentation. Contrary to Alice's first inference, Calvin believes his grade is too high (rather than too low) for the work he has performed. Despite early attempts to dismiss him (she is caught off-guard by his request and claims it will be at least two weeks before she can meet with him), Alice finds the situation rapidly escalating into a tense confrontation in which Calvin presses Alice for answers. Lauro portrays how the educational system fails Calvin on three basic fronts: preparation for higher education, performance within the higher education system, and expectations for the opportunities that open admissions will bring. Each failure roughly corresponds to the temporal categories of past, present, and future, suggesting continued marginalization for Calvin, and, more generally, for African-Americans and the economically disadvantaged.

The play reveals that the educational system has failed Calvin in his preparation for higher education. He lacks the educational skills necessary to perform coursework at a college level, and, at the end of the play, Alice admits that Calvin's autobiographical essay demonstrates that he can neither write a paragraph nor spell past a fourth grade level (33). Despite this

inadequacy, he has a valid high school diploma and has remained enrolled in college for three months. Quite simply, individuals within this system do not learn. The educational bureaucracy, rather than acknowledging the failure of the students, simply passes them along.

This failure of education is evident in the day-to-day operations of the classroom. Alice cannot identify Calvin as an individual; she confuses him with another student in a different class section. Only when Calvin pushes her--and when she desires to avoid a public confrontation--does Alice agree to meet with him for a few minutes. Before the central conflict escalates, Lauro shows how a concerned student may be overlooked and shuffled through the system. Without Calvin's persistence, he would have remained consigned to the indistinguishable mass of students whom Alice does not recognize. The implication is that the educational system views students not as individuals but rather a singular amorphous group. This phenomenon suggests how the broader social order may collectivize and marginalize groups. As Stephen L. Carter writes in Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby:

Nowadays, if you know the color of somebody's skin, you know what the person values (or should value), what causes the person supports (or should support), and how he or she thinks (or should think). (30)

When Calvin continues to seek an explanation for his grade, Lauro demonstrates that this collectivization

extends into the actual educational process. All students in the class receive the grade of "B"; Alice makes no attempt to evaluate student work. Calvin shows a clear awareness of the different levels of competency of the students. He compares his project, by his own admission a "sorry" speech about making wooden trays, to the work of Judy Horowitz, who memorized her speech and presented an elaborate demonstration on guitar playing. This distinction remains unacknowledged by Alice. The assignment of grades reflects Lauro's perspective on how open admissions functions in practice; evaluation of academic achievement is irrelevant so long as students are admitted without criteria and moved through the educational system regardless of performance. The grade itself--which, as Calvin states, stands for "good"--also serves to placate students. Though individuals, like Calvin, may claim they are not being educated, the official sanctioning body (through Alice, its representative) may declare that all students are doing "good." This situation can illustrate the connection between open admissions and marginalization, where the formal educational system groups students of minority and lower class backgrounds as a unit and silences protest by claiming that help and assistance are being provided. To the contrary, little substance is given to encourage integration of these individuals into the general social

order. Carter comments upon early objections to affirmative action programs:

affirmative action represented an effort by a terrified white power structure to buy off the victims of racist oppression . . . By offering racial quotas, special financial aid packages, and other forms of preference . . . the power structure was seeking to deny (blacks) our radical moment, to co-opt the best minds in the black community, the "talented tenth" who would, in DuBois's vision, lead black America toward equality. (134)

The confrontation of Open Admissions targets the curriculum of the program and reinforces Lauro's educational indictment. Alice attempts to explain to Calvin the difference between his Substandard Urban Speech and "proper" speech. According to Alice, presentation is more important than content. As Alice states: "Last year 10 black students were accepted into Ivy League graduate programs. And they were no better than you. They were just perceived as better!" (31). This comment demonstrates the self-reinforcing dynamic of the dominant social order; to be accepted, one must present oneself in an accepted and appropriate manner, a manner determined and controlled by the order itself. As outlined in Teaching Standard English in the Inner City, three basic choices emerge regarding "nonstandard dialects." The first, eradication, suggests the removal of the variant speech pattern, to "rid oneself of the stigma of those features by simply eradicating the features" (Fasold, xi). The second, biloquialism,

implies a dualism which identifies "a person's right to continue speaking the dialect of his home (which may be nonstandard) even after he has learned a standard school dialect" (xi). The third, appreciation of dialect differences, provides for accommodation without change:

instead of offering standard English to nonstandard speakers, we should not try to change the speech of nonstandard dialect speakers at all. If anything, we should attack the prejudices against non-standard dialects which standard English speakers have. (xi)

Wayne A. O'Neil further elucidates the argument:

we should be working to eradicate the language prejudice, the language mythology, that people grew into holding and believing. For there is clear evidence that the privileged used their false beliefs about language to the disadvantage of the deprived. (O'Neil, 7)

When Alice uses a textbook explanation of a vocal problem to demonstrate Calvin's speech pattern, she focuses upon physiological explanations for the purposes of eradication. Success, she implies, will come as Calvin learns the "proper" way to present himself, not by broadening his informational base or by improving his capacity for intellectual thought.

The perceived importance of style over substance extends far beyond the educational setting. While speech can be altered and perhaps lead to success (George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion stands as the prime artistic example) other factors--such as race or ethnic background--cannot be so easily altered. Calvin, as an African-American, will have difficulty integrating into the social order

since race, not intellectual ability, determines many of his life options. The educational system often promotes a falsehood to ethnic groups. While Alice suggests that the ability to present oneself well promotes opportunity, speech is only a small factor, given that race (and the prejudice it evokes) does not permit social modification. As Livingston writes:

To be black in a white . . . society is not merely to be disadvantaged in the competition, but to be judged by standards that are irrelevant to the competition, so that even success itself has a different meaning. (38)

Alice's statement regarding Ivy League admissions furthers the indictment of the educational system, since she suggests that those admitted to the institutions had intellectual background similar to that of Calvin, which Lauro demonstrates to be inadequate for college work.

Lauro includes a classroom example which directly parallels how roles are assigned by race in mainstream society. Calvin and other black classmates are asked to portray specific exotic characters (Othello and Cleopatra) for their Shakespeare project, while non-black students have several roles from which to choose. Despite the fact that Calvin readily admits he cannot "identify" with Othello (Alice claims that she distributes roles based upon who she believes has an ability to "feel" the part) he was obviously assigned the role based upon race. The classroom project depicts an instance of

racial typing which continues to reflect the concept of racial grouping identified by Carter.

In perhaps an even more damaging respect, the educational system fails Calvin by the creation of false optimism. Calvin enters school with a series of expectations, believing college education will provide him his "chance". If he fails within the educational system, he will "end up on the streets" (30). As Calvin soon discovers, his expectations may not be fulfilled. Unlike many other students, he possesses enough insight to realize that accepting the "B" and proceeding through the system will not automatically create opportunities for success.

The play also briefly addresses another manifestation of subtle discrimination in the educational system. No black professors teach at the institution. We learn that they were "cut" due to budget concerns. This indicates the positive feedback loop between seniority and the lack of minority representation which permeates the educational system. The play suggests that black professors--those who would have been the last hired since opportunities did not previously exist--are the first removed in a time of economic crisis. As a standard of retention and promotion, seniority appears on the surface to be non-discriminatory. In fact it preserves existing power structures by dismissing the majority of marginalized individuals who have of late entered

the system. As Ronald Fiscus argues in The Consitutional Logic of Affirmative Action, "Whatever else it accomplishes, in the context of affirmative action seniority acts to protect workers who have profited from prior racism" (97).

Lauro demonstrates how the educational system fails Calvin and the minority communities the policy claims to serve. Lauro, however, enhances and extends her treatment of this failure. Since Alice acts as an official representative of the formal educational system, one might expect education to serve her personal and economic well-being. However, the formal educational system fails Alice as it fails Calvin. Lauro shows that Alice's reluctance to educate Calvin comes from her disappointment and personal frustration with the system. Education fails her, and she then fails her students.

Alice's background as a Shakespeare scholar suggests neither the fundamental training nor the inclination to teach speech classes. Shakespeare stands as a traditional model for "high culture" and rarified intellectual activity; speech classes often evoke low-level rhetorical and linguistic skills. This discrepancy between Alice's formal training and urrent position creates personal resentment which spills over in the classroom. Her own expectations of the formal educational system have proven false. In graduate school she was told she would "have a first rate career" (31)--implying a

prestigious university position and accompanying social status--yet her aspirations have not been realized; she teaches introductory speech classes at a city college. Importantly, Lauro depicts Alice not as one who willfully denies Calvin his education out of any malicious purpose.

Although the educational system fails both Calvin and Alice, the respective impact of the failures varies greatly. Neither Calvin nor Alice achieve their expectations or goals; however, without educational advancement, the economic position of Calvin will remain significantly lower than that of Alice. Lauro highlights Alice's blindness to this economic discrepancy. Alice assumes that Calvin either owns a tape recorder or can readily borrow one (26). The possibility that he does not possess one or cannot afford one does not occur to her. Calvin points out Alice's working conditions: "clean office, private phone, name on the door" (31). This economic disparity is the reason that Calvin cannot accept Alice's explanations of how the educational system fails her. Calvin asks, "What I'm supposed to do, feel sorry for you?" (31).

The conclusion of the play can be perceived as positive in regard to individual characters but negative in its demonstration of how the formal educational system fails to address the demarginalization of racial and lower class cultures. Since Alice agrees to try to teach Calvin, a temporary bond forms between the two,

suggesting that each may benefit from the educational experience. Calvin benefits through learning, while Alice may achieve personal satisfaction from the act of "educating." However, Lauro does not indicate that Alice has the desire or ability to extend personal concern to all her students. Those who continue to accept a "B" will neither receive attention nor be educated. The extraordinary effort Calvin makes to achieve this initial start--including a strong ability to deny, negate, and refute each of Alice's efforts to dismiss him--obviously has not been made by other students. Calvin's own effort may be rewarded, but nothing will occur for the vast majority of others. The conclusion of the play suggests continued marginalization for both African-Americans and the poor.

The one-act play presents only two characters. We rely upon their interchange to extrapolate events, attitudes, and conditions which exist outside the singular office confrontation. Lauro's full-length version of Open Admissions introduces external factors on-stage. We view families, students, and other situations within the educational institution. Lauro provides more information to reinforce the educational failure designated within the one-act text. The depiction of the families of both Ginny (Lauro changes the name of the professor) and Calvin underscores their economic disparity; we now view rather than infer their respective situations.

Calvin's economic marginalization is accentuated by the simple fact that we see his impoverished domicile on stage.

Lauro's portrayal of the actual educational setting, with class sessions and the introduction of Clare, an older educator at the institution, also reinforces the failure of the system. Clare embodies the attitudes of an existing order uninterested in integration. Self-interests--such as the renting of her beach home--drive her actions. The problems of others, such as Calvin's desire to see Ginny, only distract her from her private preoccupations. Like her expansion of the family context, Lauro's extended treatment of the educational process reinforces and develops the thematic concern of the one-act text.

In the beginning of the play (prior to any school scenes) Lauro, through the use of the family units, creates parallel situations in different economic contexts where family contact and affections are stressed. The physical settings--the side by side units depicting the two apartments--suggest this parallelism, while Lauro's dramatic structure likewise suggests symmetry with its interconnecting scenes depicting the familial routines. Their activities, such as choosing dinner, preparing to shop at the grocery store, and getting everyone ready for the day, reflect the fact that both

families and both cultures share common rituals of daily life.

Not only are the household activities comparable, the emotional tone of each family unit also appears similar. Both families evince a gentle human quality. The same sort of affection exists between Salina (Calvin's sister) and Calvin as between Ginny and Peter (Ginny's husband). For example, Salina's joke about the toilet working half way (15) and Peter's comic demonstration about the tomato sauce (15) evoke a familiar, warm response from their companions; each shares a comfortable understanding with the other adult in the household. The children are also portrayed in a parallel manner, each retaining a sense of innocence which allows the adults to demonstrate parental concern. For example, the scene in which Peter and Cathy (Ginny's daughter) play basketball and the sequence in which Calvin and Georgina (his niece) pretend she is Miss Eskimo Snow Queen demonstrate a similar sense of caring and gentle good humor between the adults and the children. Lauro clearly generates an affecting sense of warmth within each family, implying that qualities of concern, compassion, and love cut across cultural boundaries.

While the family affections may run parallel, the household's economic conditions provide a stark contrast. Ginny's family obviously possesses higher economic status than the family of Calvin. In the opening

sequences, the dominant physical concern of Calvin's family is the cold. Salina, dressed in coat and socks, does not know if the toilet will function properly. By contrast Ginny displays delight in discovering a recipe for "Skillet Moussaka." Her daughter takes guitar lessons, and her husband Peter, for his job interview, will wear a Christian Dior tie.

The economic factor directly informs Calvin's and Salina's perspective on education. For them, education represents opportunity for advancement. Calvin's dream of being a professor and living in a house with a pool on Staten Island (24) exemplifies his awareness of the importance of education and its perceived ability to raise his class level. In a more emphatic manner than in the one-act play, Calvin's disadvantage here issues from the problem of economics rather than race. Success implies the ability to make money. Lauro, however, portrays this upward economic mobility as a virtual impossibility. At the conclusion of the work Calvin discovers this fallacy. When he yells at Salina, "Diploma piece of toilet paper shit" (74) he openly expresses his outrage that his belief in the educational system has been betrayed. His sister's response, "Diploma our ticket out!" (74) demonstrates her inability to see what Calvin has discovered. Salina continues to believe in the illusion that the formal educational system furthers opportunity, despite all personal evidence to the contrary.

Ginny, at the conclusion of the full-length version (as she does in the one-act play) admits the truth of the educational system. The facts surrounding Calvin's lack of educational success emerge in a more detailed fashion than in the one-act. Alice sets Calvin wise by telling him of his inadequate scores on the college readiness test and draws his admission that he has never felt capable in the classroom setting. Lauro elaborates upon the malfeasance of the educational system by having Calvin relate counsel and advice he has received. He was told to "keep on takin light weight courses" in order to graduate. When Alice states, "The last thing they want in the world is change" (85), she bluntly exposes how the existing social order preserves its centrality through an educational system which is suspect in fact and promises.

In her full-length play Lauro continues to indict the educational system through her depiction of the daily life of the college. Two of the most telling added elements involve events within the classroom--students present speeches to Ginny as part of her classroom sessions--and the introduction of the character Clare.

The classroom speeches illustrate the failure of the educational system in a manner that is only implied within the one-act play. No student exhibits full command of the material. Some show neither the ability to execute the desired objectives nor a basic comprehension of

the assignment. The on-stage enactments of presentations highlight the strong irony of using Shakespeare to teach a basic speech class. Kitty's recitation from A Midsummer Night's Dream illustrates only rote memorization; in her conversation with Ginny following her presentation, she exhibits no knowledge of "dramatic intention." Nick's speech does not relate to the course content but instead advances a personal story of a family dispute between his aunt and his grandmother. Likewise, Juan's presentation of a Petruchio monologue demonstrates little preparation or mastery of the material. Calvin recites the lines from Othello without fundamental understanding. Unlike the one-act play, the full-length version presents individual students on stage who are of various ethnic backgrounds. It is implied that they also are from the lower economic class. Lauro presents a situation where race and economic class can exist as separate functions without intrinsic linkage, and we observe that poverty overlaps other ethnic cultures beyond that of African-Americans.

Though she has presented a clear outline of the assignment at the beginning of her class, Ginny neither interprets nor grades the presentations according to her own stated expectations. Her response to each of the students reinforces the failure of the system. Ginny gives Kitty a B+ and does not acknowledge the student's desire to understand her grade. She praises

Nick for his identification with the character but skirts his content problems by invoking speech mechanics.

Juan receives a similar response; his physical speech impediment (and nothing else) is addressed. Ginny responds to Calvin by claiming that his try was "very decent." Whether or not Ginny's actions emerge from frustration or conscious manipulation does not affect the educational outcome; students fail to learn.

The character of Clare personifies the negative aspects of educational bureaucracy. If Alice can be seen to have some ultimate concern for Calvin and some conscience toward her function as an educator, Clare has none. A self-described survivor, she views the whole point of her job as "to get through til your 65 and qualify for the Comprehensive Pension Plan" (33). Clare demonstrates no commitment to students. Lauro does not convey her exact function within the educational system, since Clare does not appear to teach classes. Clare initially dismisses Calvin's attempt to see Ginny (the two women share the office). Her economic self-interest--her desire to rent her beach home at the shore, a task she seeks to accomplish on the office phone--transcends any assistance to the student. Clare is a member of a faculty committee addressing curricular reform. For her, reform is not an educational issue but one of political concern; she manipulates opinion to emerge victorious. She possesses the highest economic

level of all the characters and thus has the most to lose should the social structure alter. She therefore acts to maintain the status quo. This precludes attending to the needs of others.

Lauro does not suggest that Clare entered the system with this attitude. Toward the conclusion of the play, Lauro hints that at one time Clare had been a concerned teacher, similar to Ginny, but felt cheated by the educational system in a similar fashion. She states:

If we lower our standards any more, we'll be teaching at rock bottom level. If I could just teach like I used to . . . work with really qualified kids able to do real college work--then I'd fight like hell for . . . change and everything! (90)

Her remarks imply that at one time she believed she could make a difference; she has lost this sentiment and hence only attends to her own interests. In a sense, Lauro displays Clare as a portent, indicating what Ginny may become if she gives in to her frustrations.

Open Admissions also suggests that instruction based upon teaching students by the use of group assignments rather than through individual projects fosters failure. Clare suggests this type of teaching to Ginny as an alternative to Ginny's singular presentations; the method parallels Lauro's negative perspective of collectivization. Teaching students in groups serves the self-interest of the educator by cutting down the work load and discouraging individual

consideration. Individuals become irrelevant as the process of collectivization maintains a group "need" and hence response. Were the dominant order able to conceive of members of other groups as individuals, social change might ensue. Indeed, the failure to view people as individuals offers the possibility of complete disenfranchisement. As an extreme example, Nazis used propaganda to represent Jewish individuals as a singular abstract entity, one to be despised. Particular character traits and personal emotions were negated under the monolithic concept of "Jew." Excerpts from a speech by Julius Streicher, a high level official who generated propaganda for Hitler, is typical of this impulse:

The whole German people work, but the Jews live at the expense of the German workers . . . The only victor of the World War was the international Jew . . . We know that Germany will be free when the Jew has been excluded from the life of the people. (Varga 50)

The educational system, and, indeed, the social order, fosters marginalization through a grouping concept which, when intensified, proves hazardous.

Despite Lauro's overall negative depiction of the educational system, the educational venue emerges as a locale where cultural units have contact and individual understanding can begin. Lauro provides a direct example. At the end of Act One, Calvin and Ginny undergo their initial confrontation (what formed the essential first half of the one-act play). At the beginning of Act Two,

they return to their families. Peter does not comprehend how a "nigger" could provoke such a strong response in Ginny; for him, blacks are a group who are irrelevant. He cannot see that Ginny has made personal and emotional contact with an individual who is black. Similarly Salina's response to Calvin--that he got in a fight with a "white" professor--demonstrates that she conceives of whites as a group with hegemonic control. She believes that the professor, by belonging to the "white" group, will remove Calvin from the educational system and therefore destroy his opportunity. She fails to see that a "white" professor could act on the side of Calvin. Within each separate culture the stereotype of the "other" remains intact. Only with personal contact can the process of psychological degrouping--viewing people within a given culture as individuals rather than as a homogenous element--occur.

The conclusion of the full-length text, then, is similar to that of the one-act play. Though Ginny will attempt to teach Calvin, her personal instruction will not extend to other students. The educational system remains a failure. The existing social structure maintains itself; no change will occur. The only suggestion of demarginalization comes from the fact that, for the first time, the truth has been spoken both by Ginny and Calvin. From these revelations some progress may

be made, but the overall suggestion is one of continued marginalization for ethnic and lower class groups.

What conclusions may be drawn about the formal educational system and multiculturalism? Despite originating as a legitimate attempt to off-set marginalization, the formal educational policy of open admissions, according to Lauro, has failed. The play suggests that continued collectivization by the dominant order--conceiving of individuals as members of a single group rather than as particular human beings with individual needs--undercuts any possibility of demarginalization. True change can occur only through addressing the needs of the individual.

Would those who advocate multiculturalism concur with or denounce Lauro's position? To suggest that change can occur by only addressing the individual runs counter to multicultural principles which find various cultures marginalized by social structures and suggest group empowerment as a method to overcome these obstacles. Within the work Calvin makes a concerted effort to gain Alice's attention; as an individual he may succeed, but Lauro suggests little change for the cultural units of which he is a member. Since multiculturalism underscores the oppression of the group, Lauro's suggestion that change must emerge from the individual may appear as one that preserves the existing order. We must note that Calvin never seeks group empowerment through cultural

consciousness. While he recognizes that he is both black and poor, he views education as his method of escape. In ironic contrast, the historical example of open admissions contradicts Lauro's position, since the policy developed from student demonstrations and demands by ethnic groups.

Lauro reinforces the concept of individuality by suggesting, particularly in the full-length version with its family scenes and their parallel emotional content, that there are no human differences between cultural groups. "Cultural" distinctions represent surface categorizations which disguise the fact that all humans are essentially the same. This view challenges multicultural principles since it implies that there are not different "cultures" per se. The perspective also begins to undercut the fundamental need for structural change; if humans are all the same, then individual effort can overcome all obstacles. Calvin himself exemplifies this individualism; unlike other students, he possesses the motivation to seek answers to his questions. Lauro indicates that individual effort, not culture or group empowerment, should create demarginalization. Some will claim that such a view ignores both historical reality and the basic principle of multiculturalism which is grounded upon structural denial of opportunities for certain groups.

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CHAPTER FOUR
CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD: DEAFNESS AND "DIFFERENCE"

When the Broadway production of Mark Medoff's drama Children of a Lesser God opened at the Longacre Theatre on March 30, 1980, critical reaction proved mostly positive. Clive Barnes labelled the work "one of the most winning and thoughtful plays you are likely to encounter" (302); Edwin Wilson wrote that the play "contains powerful material and brings to life subjects important to us all. By doing so it affords an experience rare in today's theatre" (303). Walter Kerr found "the pursuit engrossing, the two principals dazzlingly accomplished in their interplay" (302). As testament to such accolades, the show went on to win the 1980 Tony Award for Best Play. Other critics, however, expressed negative reactions based upon the approach of the work toward the deaf community. Gerald Weales noted the difficulties of discussing the play without resorting to a "kind of condescension," one which blurred the line between the play's status as a work of fiction and the real-life opportunity it provided for deaf actors to perform: "Is it the play that is being applauded, or the occasion that allows some talented members of the National Theatre of the Deaf to move into the mainstream of American theater?" (505) Robert Brustein called Medoff's work "a supreme example of a new Broadway genre-the Disability Play," which he described as "really

a subgenre of a time-tested Broadway artifact--The Play You Are Not Allowed to Dislike." He continues:

to fail to respond to plays about blacks or women or homosexuals, for example, is to be vulnerable to charges of racism, sexism, homophobia, or getting up on the wrong side of the bed. Now that the handicapped have organized themselves into another minority pressure group, they have access to the same kind of blackmail . . . (23)

From an opposite perspective, Arden Neisser claims in The Other Side of Silence that the play is "the most important artistic event ever experienced by the deaf community" (262). It is clear that Medoff's dramatic approach to deaf individuals who seek to integrate with mainstream society has generated varied and conflicting opinions.

Children of a Lesser God chronicles the development of a personal relationship between James, an educator who teaches speech at a residential school for the deaf, and Sarah, a student who does not have any ability to hear. The first act depicts their initial encounters within the educational system (she is assigned to him as a student) and ensuing courtship. The second act portrays their marriage and its collapse. At the end of the work Sarah concludes that the marriage could succeed only if she and James could meet "not in silence or in sound but someplace else" (70). Her statement emphasizes what Medoff depicts throughout the work, the belief that assimilation or integration between

the two communities--the deaf and the hearing--cannot occur because of physical distinctions and social pressures. The strength and power of Medoff's statement emerge from both the depiction of the educational institution, whose unacknowledged purpose is to maintain the social dominance of the hearing, and the failure of the couple's marriage, which suggests that commitment and love are insufficient to overcome the problems of any "differences."

Unlike most dramas, in which the written text is spoken, much of Medoff's text is communicated through sign language. (For purposes of this analysis, I will use the term "speak" to refer to oral expression while the term "sign" will refer to communication through the formalized gestures of sign language). Before examining the effect of this presentation upon production and theme, we must examine the idea that language choice is arbitrary. This issue proves central, since the dominant culture--within the play, those who hear--controls the social order through the grouping of individuals according to their ability to speak. Semiotics, loosely defined as the "science of signs," will serve to explain this perception. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, a seminal figure in the development of the semiotic method, concludes that "the linguistic sign is arbitrary" (160); there is no natural connection between the signified (the object or concept to which one refers) and the

signifier (the word which one uses to refer to the object). Thus, in English, the signifier "bird" refers to the signified feathered flying creature; in German, the signifier "vogel" refers to the same signified. The connection of both "bird" and "vogel" to the same signified is an arbitrary assignment within each language system. The reverse is true. A similar signifier within two separate language systems may have different meanings. In English, for example, the term "Esso" is a direct and specific reference to the oil company which preceded Exxon; in Spanish the same sound signifies the simple and common demonstrative pronoun "that."

In Saussure's original analysis his primary focus is speech. Later semioticians, such as C.S. Peirce, would demonstrate how most signs, whether aural or visual, connect in an arbitrary fashion to their signified. If the basis of language is arbitrary, by extension there should be little value difference between language systems. Neither German nor English is superior to the other; they are simply different. Similarly, if the assignment of signifier to signified is arbitrary, there is no reason why speech, an auditory method of communication, should be thought superior to gesture, a visual method. The difference lies in the fact that the dominant social order communicates through speech and not through sign. (The semiotics of meaning may overlap between the deaf and the hearing. An example

of this occurs in Act One. While at a restaurant, Sarah signs to James to order her a milkshake. According to the script, the sign language gesture for "milkshake" is the same gesture used among hearing individuals to indicate masturbation. The gesture for both the deaf Sarah and the hearing James is the same; the connection to concept is arbitrary.)

Within the play Medoff demonstrates how sign language does not suffer in its capacity to communicate ideas. The deaf use sign as adeptly as the hearing use speech. For example, Orin and Sarah argue in sign language (53). James' inability to understand their argument (due to the rapidity of their signing) does not diminish the adriotness of their communication or the intelligence and complexity of their thought. Toward the final moments of the play, Sarah's letter to an employment commission states explicitly what we have witnessed throughout the performance: " . . . My brain understands a lot, and my eyes are my ears, and my hands are my voice, and my language, my speech, my ability to communicate is as great as yours" (65). No difficulty in communication exists within each individual group. Problems emerge when those with different language systems attempt to communicate. Since, however, the general social order is oriented to speech, it privileges this mode of communication.

This arbitrariness of language informs understanding of how the performance aspects of the work reinforce several textual themes. During the play, Sarah does not speak. A non-signing audience would be unable to understand the actual content of Sarah's communication except for the fact that James verbally repeats what Sarah signs. Medoff creates a stage convention which indicates the situation of the deaf; the deaf cannot communicate by themselves with the non-signing dominant order and must use a translator who can communicate in both language systems.

With this performance technique Medoff also highlights two distinct qualities which commonly are assumed to exist together: speech and intelligence. This concept can be traced through Western history; as psychologist Donald Moores states, "Greek philosophers generally believed that thought could be conceived only through the medium of articulate words" (29). By having James speak what Sarah signs, the audience becomes aware that the two qualities are not necessarily coincident and do not imply one another. Medoff provides a direct example of this false assumption; until the age of twelve Sarah, an individual with normal intelligence, had been labelled as retarded due to her inability to speak. Her categorization thus emerged from a social order which equates speech and intelligence and thus stigmatizes the deaf who do not speak.

James' oral repetition also demonstrates how a dominant order may create the appearance of a "natural" pattern which in fact may be artificial. At first an audience may be disconcerted by the performance technique. There is no reason for James' oral repetition within the dramatic world itself since James is proficient in sign language. He translates Sarah's signs simply for the sake of the audience. As the action of the play continues, the audience gradually accepts the fact that James is speaking for Sarah and recognizes his oral restatements as valid translations of what she signs. The audience becomes accustomed to an artificial construct, and the pattern is therefore accepted as "normal." At the conclusion of the piece, Sarah makes her only attempt to speak; this attempt defamiliarizes the construct. The audience returns to its initial recognition that the pattern of communication to which it has become accustomed throughout the course of the evening--James' signing Sarah's words--is in fact artificial. The performance of the play stands as a metaphor for what occurs within the social order when speech is accepted as the "normal" pattern of communication. By extension, other patterns which are labelled "natural" may also be artificial constructs. This notion has implications not only for deaf individuals but also for others who may be restricted by seemingly "natural" patterns. As we have cited Rothenberg in Chapter

One, definitions of "reality" built into the educational system, and hence the social order, may lack basis in fact; the only method to eliminate these definitions is by consciously demonstrating their specious validity.

We have been assuming a binary opposition between the deaf and hearing. This opposition is itself mistaken. In fact, there are at least three levels of hearing ability: normal hearing, partial hearing, and total deafness. Within the play Sarah is the only completely deaf individual. Both Orin (a student and childhood friend) and Lydia (another student) possess limited hearing ability. Yet Orin and Lydia are labelled deaf, grouped by the educational institution into a similar category as Sarah. This facile categorization of the deaf leads to marginalization. Despite the fact that Sarah, Orin, and Lydia are distinct individuals with unique personal needs, the hearing order uses their deafness to determine their needs and wants while individuality is disregarded. (Within the literature dealing with the deaf there is yet another distinction--those individuals born deaf are considered differently from those who may have at one time had hearing ability.)

This binary opposition leads to another false supposition, one that equates the capacity to lip read and to speak (and therefore function within hearing society) with the ability to hear. For the dominant

order, when deaf individuals learn lip-reading and speech, they are no longer thought of as being deaf. Nathan Lane, in The Mask of Benevolence, states:

Late deafened people who make an effort to speak English and lip-read, to overcome the hurdles of their handicap, are much less discomfiting to hearing people than the members of the deaf community, with their distinctly different ways and language. (9)

The educational institution in which Orin, Lydia, and Sarah are enrolled aims to disguise their condition rather than alter it. Individuals like Sarah will never hear despite learning to lip-read and to speak. Through acquiescing to the dominant mode of communication, however, these individuals would no longer be treated as "deaf." The educational system fosters assimilation by "disguising" the condition of their students, not accepting the physical quality of deafness but submerging it. The dominant order does seek to effect hearing in the deaf where it is possible. Lydia, for example, uses mechanical aids to supplement her limited hearing ability. Still, where no hearing is possible, disguise must be created. The current debate within the medical and deaf communities regarding the development of "cochlear implants," a device which can be surgically installed and can directly stimulate portions of the brain to create the sensation of hearing, has generated disagreement based upon appeals for and against cultural assimilation. Some argue that the device would enable the deaf to function in normal

society. Physician James O. Pickles writes of its benefits:

At the most basic level, patients with (cochlear implants) report that one of the benefits is just being in some sort of auditory contact with the environment. Being able to hear alarm signals and approaching traffic is obviously valuable . . . even a few auditory cues can be of use in lip reading . . . some feedback from the patient's own voice is invaluable in helping him control it. (312)

Others see the device as destructive to both deaf individuals and their community by forcing acquiescence to the dominant hearing world; in reality the ability to hear neither precludes nor guarantees a productive and fulfilling life. As Lane states, "That (cochlear implants) are presented as a cure-all and are embraced by educators reveals once again the central program of forced assimilation and denial of a difference" (135).

The educational institution in Children of a Lesser God does not seek true integration but rather the forced acceptance of a dominant cultural standard. The institution is isolationist in practice, existing as a residential institution which segregates and removes deaf individuals from the general society. It in turn claims to assimilate its students to that society. On the surface this appears contradictory. In fact, when one recognizes that the purpose of the institution is to suppress the qualities of deafness, this isolationism is understandable. Through lip-reading and speech, the student's inability to hear will be disguised.

The dominant order will be maintained since those who enter the order will thus fashion themselves according to its standards. The "discomfit" to which Lane refers will be eliminated. The institution announces itself as an advocate for demarginalization--claiming it wants to integrate the deaf into normal society--when in fact it prescribes acquiescence.

The importance of lip-reading and speech is reinforced by the fact that within the educational institution these abilities are viewed as "prerequisite" for other learning. Within the play we see no instructional activity other than the teaching of speech. This implies that before the deaf can learn other material, they must first learn to speak. Medoff demonstrates that this is erroneous. Sarah, Orin, and Lydia are individuals of normal intelligence who are as capable of learning as any hearing person. Yet the institution focuses entirely on the process of speech development to the exclusion of instruction in other curriculum.

For Medoff, mainstream society sees deafness as a handicap which must be suppressed if those individuals wish to gain access to the dominant order. The label "handicap" itself implies deviance from the norm. Medoff, however, shows that deafness need not be a functional handicap. The deaf experience is a different manner of existence, one that is not intrinsically negative. Indeed, the fundamental concept of "handicapped" remains

under debate; current efforts to substitute the term "differently abled" for "handicapped" serve as an attempt to remove the linguistic stigma of abnormality which the latter word connotes. Within the educational system this issue remains a point of contention. Some suggest that to "mainstream" selected individuals (who may have been previously designated as in need of special treatment due to physical or emotional attributes) by placing them in a regular classroom setting serves not only to educate the individuals themselves but also the other students around them. Under this concept mainstreaming

gives handicapped children the chance to join in the 'mainstream of life' by including them in the regular . . . school experience, and gives nonhandicapped children the opportunity to learn and grow by experiencing the strengths and weaknesses of their handicapped friends. (Hayden 4)

Others argue that mainstreaming places individuals in an environment where they will not learn; therefore they should be separated from the regular classroom where special attention may be given to their particular needs. As Jesse Thomas, a deaf student testifying before the National Council on Disabilities stated:

Learning through an interpreter is very hard; it's bad socially in the mainstream; you are always outnumbered; you don't feel like it's your school; you never know deaf adults; you don't belong; you don't feel comfortable as a deaf person. (Lane 136)

Medoff further demonstrates the effect of labelling the handicapped as deviant. As the lawyer Klein

assumes--and within the play she is the one most removed from the deaf community, having no contact with the deaf prior to accepting a lawsuit initiated by Orin against the educational institution--all deaf people are unhappy because they cannot hear or speak (55). For the dominant order, a consequence of deafness is personal unhappiness. This logic serves mainstream interests since it suggests that even if the deaf claim to be happy, they cannot know true personal satisfaction until they acquiesce to the dominant system. The idea that a given group knows the best interests of another group has frequently been used through history to justify domination. For example, historian Jonathan Riley-Smith writes of the Crusades:

The standard Christian criteria for justifiable war had been developed in the fourth century: a right intention on the part of the participants, which should always be expressed through love of God and neighbour; a just cause; and legitimate proclamation by a qualified authority (xxviii).

Against the controls and constraints of the hearing world, Orin is used by Medoff to exhibit the resistance of a marginalized individual. Orin sues the school, claiming employment discrimination based upon the lack of deaf instructors at the institution. At the conclusion of the play, he wins the legal case. However, Orin's call for the school to hire more deaf individuals postulates no attitudinal change by the deaf or the educational system. Deaf and hearing individuals would

be placed within the same working environment through force of law. If one of the goals of integration is to foster common concern and understanding, Orin's solution would prove ineffective, since it merely advances the deaf in the system on an "as is" basis. Medoff suggests that this legal process of forced demarginalization--which in fact remains a common practice, evidenced in attempts to desegregate through busing--would be insufficient. When Franklin, headmaster of the school, asserts that Orin wins "nothing" with his lawsuit, he forwards Medoff's conclusion that despite legal enforcement, attitudes remain essentially the same. In this specific instance integration will fail since Orin's suit neither promotes understanding nor addresses any structural or fundamental issues.

Another implication of the lawsuit bears note. Though sanctioned by the dominant order, the institution itself exists outside mainstream boundaries. Altering the institution would thus have little if any influence upon the hearing order. Orin's achievement will lack impact beyond the isolated boundaries of the institution.

Medoff concludes that the educational system fails to integrate members the marginalized deaf into the dominant order. He also intimates that forced legal action ultimately cannot create true integration. The capping illustration of the complexities of possible integration occurs with the failed marriage of Sarah

and James. Marriage is not compulsory; two people choose to marry based upon deep personal and emotional commitments. At the end of the work Sarah and James separate. The marriage fails for several reasons. Sarah has not learned speech. She perceives that others impose roles upon her in order to fulfill their own needs. The marriage does not have external support but rather exists in an environment of disapproval. Medoff demonstrates that love, affection, and commitment may prove insufficient in offsetting physical differences and social concerns.

Medoff stresses that the marriage does not fail due to lack of effort or love. The personal commitment of James and Sarah is wholly sincere. When both characters state "I love you" at the end of Act One, the audience believes in their intimacy and attachment since we have watched the steady development of their relationship. They share personal and intimate information. Sarah confesses that she had sexual intercourse with hearing boys because she was good at it (28). James tells of his mother's suicide. When he states "We're a team. We're unbeatable" (43), he truly believes that their partnership will succeed. Medoff structures the play so that the first act--the development of Sarah and James' relationship--confirms the firm grounding of their commitment. Should the marriage fail, we gather the cause will not stem from want of love. The first

act reinforces the concept that assimilation and, indeed, integration, may not be possible.

One reason the marriage fails involves Sarah's unwillingness to speak. Sarah has reasons to avoid speaking. To speak would both demonstrate acquiescence to the dominant order and destroy the self-identity she has established as a deaf individual. However, to avoid speaking creates a distinct resentment in James, an animus which emerges clearly in their confrontation at the play's conclusion. James tries to force Sarah to speak: "You want to talk to me, then you learn my language (67). Medoff emphasizes that it is James who has acquiesced to Sarah by communicating in her language. The personal resentment serves as ironic counterpoint to a major theme of the work. Medoff shows that a member of the hearing order has in fact conceded to the wishes of the marginalized individual. James has learned to sign; Sarah shows no desire to speak. Thus while James believes in teamwork, he has borne the necessity of change. Since marriage is a partnership, a single individual--in this case James--cannot alone insure the marriage's success. By extension, Medoff suggests that in order to integrate the deaf and hearing cultures, both must change. Change for accommodation by the dominant order must be complemented by efforts of the marginalized individuals.

Throughout the play Sarah is sensitive to the roles which are placed upon her from without. She finds it impossible to be perceived as a unique individual and, at the play's conclusion, she withdraws to be unto herself. When Sarah signs to James she believes that he, Orin, and Klein treat her like "an idiot" (57) in order to fulfill their own needs, she directly expresses her personal frustration that others do not treat her as an individual with her own personal desires. Her plea at the play's climax, "What about me? What I want? What I want?" (68), punctuates this frustration in a clear and forceful manner.

Sarah feels pressed on a number of fronts. Sarah claims that James treats her like a deaf person in order to change her into a hearing person. Sarah claims that Orin does not want her to appear in the courtroom as a hearing person since he needs a "pure deaf person" (57) for strategic purposes. In court, Sarah could stand as a symbol for the deaf and thus strengthen the suit's argument. Yet Orin believes her marriage to James places her within the world of the hearing (which does not serve Orin's need). As she states, Orin "practically accuses her of being a phony hearing person" (53). Sarah believes the lawyer Klein wants hearing people to feel sorry for her. This attitude serves Klein's interest since winning the lawsuit benefits her career. In sum, Sarah believes her own desires are not considered by

others. Whether or not others in actuality do "type" her is of no consequence since her personal and emotional responses are based upon these perceptions.

Furthermore, by having Sarah rapidly recite the "typings" to James without differentiation, Medoff indicates that no individual role assignment carries any more or less importance to Sarah--they are all equally disturbing. Sarah fails to note that her husband's wishes may be of a different and more personal nature than those of Orin and Klein. By seeing no difference in these impositions, she reduces James' status as her husband (a committed emotional partner) and accentuates what she believes are his self-interests. James loves Sarah in a way that others in the play do not. By grouping James with the others, Sarah furthers his resentment which leads to the failure of their marriage.

External forces also encourage this failure. The relationship does not exist within a vacuum but rather within a social order which exerts strong pressure for its dissolution. Disapproval emerges from both the dominant order and the marginalized deaf. Franklin derides the marriage and claims that Sarah and James will have difficulty each and every time they enter the hearing world (35). When he discusses the lawsuit with James, he states, "I won't continue in this field if the subjects of my efforts are going to tell me how to minister to them" (64). Though he speaks to the legal

case, his subtext refers to Sarah and James. Orin is likewise against the marriage. He believes that Sarah has betrayed her own culture and engages in mocking her. His decision to involve her in the lawsuit, despite the fact that she expressed no desire to assist, not only serves his legal purpose but also acts as a strong source of friction in the marriage. Even Lydia fails to support the couple. She has had a schoolgirl crush on James since their introduction in Act One. Her visits to James' household in Act Two, though perhaps innocent on the surface, incite and escalate conflict between James and Sarah. Lydia reacts to their split by calling it a "wise contemplation" on his part (63). When she states that he needs a "girl who talks," we understand the direct reference to herself.

The marriage ultimately fails, and Sarah leaves James. The couple's personal commitment has not proven sufficient to overcome the societal pressures and problems of linguistic differences. Sarah and James understand that assimilation to one culture or the other cannot work, and that a new environment (which currently does not exist) must be created. Their differences are not currently reconcilable. Medoff suggests that the recognition of this impasse may be positive, but he does not offer a solution for such reconciliation. Education as it stands cannot achieve this end; the system is demonstrated as one which protects the interests

of the status quo. Legal recourse forces two cultures together without requisite attitudinal changes. Personal commitment ultimately fails to overcome differences.

The conclusions about the formal educational system and multicultural principles in Children of a Lesser God are several. Medoff reinforces the concept that marginalization is built-in to the social structure. Tradition maintains that the deaf are "handicapped" and need to be isolated; this isolated environment preserves the existing order by forcing the deaf to use the dominant language system before they may enter the mainstream. The play indicates a need to develop a middle ground for a successful integration of cultures; that is, members of neither the deaf nor hearing communities can thrive in an environment which categorically denies their physical attributes. In this work, the generative source which creates the cultural gap--that of an ability to hear--appears difficult to overcome. How can this middle ground develop? Medoff does not say. He concludes the work only by indicating the failure of existing methods. However, to suggest that Medoff implies any integration between two cultures to be an impossibility would be over-extending the conceptual framework of the play. Both deaf and hearing individuals appear equally capable of human emotions of love, compassion, despair. Nothing indicates a fundamental difference in intellect or emotion; the

only difference involves basic physiology which leads to a different language system.

How would those who advocate multiculturalism view Medoff's work? The play postulates that both cultures must change in order for successful integration. The multicultural argument is often viewed as placing marginalized cultures into the educational system (and hence the social order) on an "as is" basis, implying that the dominant order needs to accommodate the interests of marginalized groups. Medoff suggests that simple accommodation may not necessarily succeed. As the failed marriage demonstrates, even the individual and personal commitment of love cannot bridge cultural gaps if only one side changes. Both sides must develop an understanding of the other and create a new central ground. For demarginalization, mutual change must occur; no effective solution is otherwise possible.

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CHAPTER FIVE
SISTER MARY IGNATIUS EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU:
PLURALISM AND INTOLERANCE

The four plays we have examined up to this point have delineated a clear binary opposition between a marginalized culture (women, the black/poor, and the deaf) and a dominant order. This order, consciously or unconsciously, functions as an impediment to the attempts of the marginalized to achieve social, economic, and personal success. We now look at two plays which do not directly address this opposition. These works examine the conflicts within a given cultural unit without placing it in dialectical conflict with another. Nevertheless both texts contend with and highlight other issues fundamental to the multicultural debate.

Christopher Durang's one-act Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You remains his greatest commercial success, winning a 1980 Obie award and running 947 performances at Playwrights Horizons (Demastes 95). Durang does not examine the educational institution--the Catholic elementary school--in adversarial relation to a dominant order. The play instead examines the principles and beliefs which serve to bind its own culture. The parochial school depicted by Durang belies, as critic Robert Brustein states, "an institutional conspiracy to suppress spontaneity and disseminate lies" (Brustein 24). The Catholic faith in Durang's play functions

itself as a dominant discourse, claiming to hold the "infallible" truth. Durang's final position implies that an approach to education which emphasizes one's own cultural principles could hinder rather than assist integration into the general social order. Durang specifically addresses the Catholic faith as the boundary of a cultural unit; by extension, other educational institutions which advocate selected cultural principles may also inhibit the process of integration.

The educational institution Durang examines stands as a paradox when viewed from the multicultural perspective. It suggests that a system designed to preserve a cultural unit (a position advocated within such uses of the term "multicultural education" as the Single Group Studies approach) may run counter to the principles of cultural pluralism; the Catholic belief system, grounded in the possession of the "infallible" truth, dictates that other cultures or belief systems may not be tolerated. As Harold E. Buetow writes in

The Catholic School:

By and large, the Church sees the Catholic school as a privileged place which is potentially a temple because of the sacredness of its pursuits, and a beacon, lighting the way to a life of moral courage and providing Catholics responses to current change. In perceiving its schools in the way, the Church reveals a classicist orientation, emphasizing objective values and unchanging truths. (14).

Therefore, within the multicultural frame, the institution stands as a positive force, preserving the Catholic

cultural identity, yet it is also negative, in that this identity does not tolerate other cultural perspectives. The paradox intensifies with the recognition that, despite the fact that religion generally is not identified as a generative source of culture within the multicultural argument, Catholics throughout American history have been subject to discrimination and prejudice in a manner similar to that experienced by groups which typically fall under the current multicultural umbrella. As Andrew Greeley writes, "Most serious students of American history are willing to admit that the country has been swept by wave after wave of anti-Catholic sentiment" (17).

We must recognize the dualism present in the American attitude toward education in religious institutions. The Bill of Rights of the American Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," a condition which might best be achieved, as Thomas Jefferson stated in 1802, by "building a wall of separation between church and state" (Menacker 59). This "separation" continues to be debated in public school education, where issues of religious-oriented curriculum, instruction, and funding frequently reach the courts for solutions. Yet, while the state mandates formal education until a certain age, it cannot assign a student to a specific educational institution. Under

the landmark 1925 Supreme Court decision *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (also known as the "Pierce Compromise"), it was established that the state could not force students to attend public school. Private schools, including those affiliated with religion, could fulfill the mandated requirement. The state, however, does retain the right and responsibility to inspect and regulate all schools to insure that a satisfactory education is offered.

As Menacker states, the decision was

activist enough to restrain the state from forcing its will on parents without sufficient cause, yet restraintist enough to neither make new law nor diminish the state's plenary power over education in doing so. (24)

The states therefore sanction education in religious affiliated institutions, despite the fact that the states may not advocate religious principles.

Such judicial decisions highlight the point that religious schools are selected by their participants for the transmission of spiritual values. For Durang, this issue of "choice" is misconceived and misrepresented. Although parents have the option of sending their children to a public or parochial school, the children themselves must attend under parental authority. Young students have no options but to receive the cultural values and information which the institution teaches. In this light, Durang's play seems to support the multicultural view that dominant discourse imprints individuals at

a young age and structures the patterns of thought which they exhibit throughout their lives.

Durang constructs Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You in three basic sections. In the first section, Sister Mary Ignatius, an instructor at a Catholic elementary school, explains various theological points of Catholic doctrine to the audience. Her seven year old student Thomas enters and assists her with these explanations. Durang permits the audience to judge the curriculum and instruction of Sister Mary on its merits and, in the person of Thomas, lets us see the direct effect of this education upon a young pupil. During the second section, four adults, all former students of Sister Mary, perform the school's traditional Christmas pageant. In the final section these students confront Sister Mary regarding the negative effects that their education has had upon their lives. Durang indicts the educational institution based in Catholic faith. The transmitted values do not relate to any inherent truth but only to the perpetuation of the religious doctrine and its unyielding dogma. The system also fails in its obvious aim to promote cultural consciousness. Despite an indoctrinating discourse, individuals often leave the "church famiuy" upon discovery of its contradictions.

In the first sequence Sister Mary lectures the audience on theology. Durang soon undercuts the specific

credos of the Catholic church and its concept of infallible truth. Despite the fact that specific matters (such as the canonization of saints) have undergone revision throughout the centuries (a fact which Sister Mary readily admits), she presents current church positions as simple and indisputable fact. The audience perceives the irony of claiming infallibility since the "infallible" truth has changed throughout the history of the church.

In Sister Mary's explanation of limbo, Durang gives an example of how "truth" fluctuates:

There is also limbo, which is where unbaptized babies were sent for eternity before the Ecumenical Council and Pope John XXIII. The unbaptized babies sent to limbo never leave limbo and so never get to heaven. Now unbaptized babies are sent straight to purgatory where, presumably, someone baptizes them and they are sent on to heaven. The unbaptized babies who died before the Ecumenical Council, however, remain in limbo and will never be admitted to heaven. (28)

Clearly the veracity of "fact" accords to the wishes (and whims) of the Ecumenical Council. Sister Mary further explains:

A lot of fault-finding non-Catholics run around saying that Catholics believe the Pope is infallible whenever he speaks. This is untrue. The Pope is infallible only on certain occasions, when he speaks 'ex cathedra' which is Latin for 'out of the cathedral.' When he speaks 'ex cathedra,' we must accept what he says at that moment as dogma, or risk hellfire, or, now that things are becoming more liberal, many, many years of purgatory. (28)

Durang directly highlights the logical inconsistency evident in the Pope's determination of the truth, which

changes from one occasion to another. Durang's sarcasm is strengthened with recognition that the dogma Sister Mary espouses is essentially accurate; these inconsistencies are not the product of Durang's imagination but exist in actual Catholic doctrine. As Durang states of Walter Kerr's review, "One of the things he said, as a dyed-in-the-wool Catholic, is that it was interesting how little of the dogma I had changed" (Savran 29).

The play demonstrates that, like the educational system of the dominant social order, an institution designed to preserve a specific minority culture may be equally capable of controlling discourse and, contrary to pluralistic principles, exclude alternate viewpoints. Yet Sister Mary does not question the illogic and inconsistencies of Catholic dogma; she merely accepts or ignores its obvious contradictions. For example, when asked "If God is all powerful, why does He allow evil in the world?" (30), Sister Mary responds by skipping the question.

Thomas provides a direct example of how the educational process affects its students. He functions as an automaton, capable of reproducing Sister Mary's dogma verbatim. Although he knows all of his Commandments perfectly and can distinguish between mortal and venial sins, he appears incapable of independent thought. Unlike the audience, who may perceive the inconsistencies, Thomas questions nothing. He professes belief in the

infallability of Sister Mary and the Catholic church. When she asks Thomas how he knows "Christ loves us an infinite amount," he responds "Because you tell us" (31). Thomas, age 7 (the age when, according to Sister Mary, God feels "we are capable of knowing"), is introduced to a belief system which dismisses rather than encourages intellectual exploration and alternate viewpoints. Durang demonstrates how children easily accept any value system as they are susceptible to adult manipulation and have not yet acquired broad life experiences. This aligns with the theories of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, as E.D. Hirsch states "believed that we should encourage the natural development of young children and not impose adult ideas upon them before they can truly understand them" (Hirsch xiv). In this context, education emerges as indoctrination.

Durang not only undercuts the content of this education but also its process. Sister Mary gives Thomas cookies as a method of rewarding correct answers. The reward does not depend upon any demonstration of understanding but merely "proper" recitation. Thomas' reactions also reveal a love and genuine fondness for his teacher. As Durang states in the author's notes, "she rewards him with not only cookies but warmth, approval, bounces on the knee, etc. All this fondness and attention could easily make Thomas adore Sister" (Durang 53). The educational relationship between Sister

Mary and Thomas is not one of intellectual understanding but one of physical and emotional stimulus and response.

During the play's second sequence four former students (Diane, Philomena, Gary, and Aloysius) arrive and perform the school's traditional Christmas pageant. During the enactment the action does not progress forward; the interplay between Sister Mary, Thomas, and the former students is attenuated. The pageant enraptures Sister Mary; she responds at its conclusion that it was "lovely," that "the old stories really are the best" (41). Since the performance receives only praise, we might conclude that the pageant was respectful, well-intentioned, and traditional in presentation. Yet the content and style of performance express a perceptible flippancy, one that we suspect would raise Sister Mary's ire. For example, Gary, portraying Joseph, declares:

And so Jesus instructed his parents . . .
and said many unusual things, many of them
irritating to parents. Things like 'Before
Abraham was, I am" and "Do you know that I
must go about my father's business?' after
we'd been worried to death and unable to find
Him for hours and hours. (38)

Aloysius, as the angel in the tomb, proclaims

For yea I say to you, at the end of the world
the first in the class will be the last in
the class, the boy with the A in arithmetic
will get F, the girl with F in geography will
graduate with honors, and those with brains
will be cast down in favor of those who are
like dumb animals. For thus are the ways
of the Lord. (40)

Diane recites several lines which directly parallel and parody statements which Sister Mary made to the audience during the play's initial sequence. In opting to stay at the stable, Diane, as the Virgin Mary, responds: "Sister says we have choice over everything, because God gave us free will to decide between good and evil" (37), echoing the earlier theological explanations by Sister Mary. Regarding the Immaculate Conception, Diane declares: "This is called my Immaculate Conception, which is not to be confused with my Virgin Birth. Everyone makes this error, it makes me lose my patience" (38), a statement which also invokes an earlier diatribe of the nun. Given the obvious flippancy of the pageant, Sister Mary's lack of objections could indicate a further indictment by Durang of her position as educator. Despite resolute affirmations and vehement explanations of dogma, she fails to recognize plain alterations within the religious story. Her strength as a valid transmitter of Catholic values collapses since she does not acknowledge contradictions in a performance event based upon the faith to which she claims unwavering commitment.

In the final sequence the students reveal to Sister Mary their deviation from traditional Catholic doctrine and life style. These former students stand as the conceptual opposite of Thomas. The 7 year old is now being indoctrinated in the faith. The four older students reveal the deleterious effect of this inculcation. Durang

implies the possible failure of separatist education as a means of maintaining cultural consciousness. We see that in later life some students of Catholic education do not abide by the faith and leave its teachings. Though Sister Mary may successfully "train" seven year old Thomas, her efforts in education may prove ineffective, and, indeed, negative in the long run. Cultural esteem may not be sustained if the educational process is ineffective in preparing the pupils for life experiences or if it denies basic realities about the diverse world in which the students must function.

Three of the four students meet with Sister Mary's disapproval. We discover that Diane has had two abortions. Philomena bore a baby out of wedlock. Gary is homosexual. Sister Mary censures these individuals for their failure to abide by Catholic doctrine; no other factors seem relevant. For example, the fact that Diane's first pregnancy stemmed from a rape is of no consequence. Sister Mary does not note qualifying circumstances or extenuating contexts, but condemns by the letter of doctrinal law. Nowhere do we discern any sense of humanity, compassion, or understanding. The extremity of Sister Mary's intolerance reflects Durang's negative indictment of the Catholic faith.

Aloysius is the only student to receive Sister Mary's approval. Durang structures his revelations so that this favor seems ludicrous and wholly unwarranted.

Sister Mary relates that she is "very pleased" because Aloysius abides by the rules of the church; he is married, has two children, and goes to mass and confession at least once a year. Yet, when Aloysius reveals that he is an alcoholic, that he has begun to beat his wife and has contemplated suicide, Sister Mary dismisses these actions as immaterial, stating "within bounds, all those things are venial sins" (44). Since Aloysius follows the approved guidelines of the church, he is within the fold. Simple allegiance to a cultural standard may be illogical and fail to account for external contexts.

Sister Mary fails to see that individuals do not continue to believe in this allegiance. In a somewhat climactic moment, she states: "My students always loved me. I was the favorite" (45). We soon see this is untrue, as the students reveal their deep enmity which issues from Sister Mary's instruction during their childhoods. Aloysius dislikes Sister Mary because she refused him permission to go to the bathroom; he constantly wet himself. She responds to his charges by calling him a crybaby and belittles his suffering by comparing it to that of Christ: "He suffered three hours of agony on the cross, surely a full bladder pales by comparison" (47). She minimizes the simple yet important physical needs of a child. Philomena in turn accuses Sister Mary of abuse. She claims that the nun called her "stupid," tapped a pencil upon her head, and slammed her into

a blackboard. Gary declares that he simply found Sister Mary scary. These disclosures demonstrate Sister Mary's means of control--physical abuse and psychological intimidation. As Thomas' cookies function as a reward for compliance, physical punishment and mental distress attends non-compliance. Yet, as Durang states in his notes:

I also want to urge that the actress play that Sister really does want the best for her students, it's just that she feels she has the infallible truth on most matters and so is understably confused and angered when her students turn out not to have followed her teaching. (58)

Durang highlights the genuineness of Sister Mary's commitment. This nonetheless does not diminish her injurious acts, but renders her less of a conscious destructive entity. Even with positive intentions an educational process generated from a single source based in intolerance may go awry.

Of all the students, Diane trusted Sister Mary most fully: "I believe how you said the world worked, and that God loved us, and the story of the Good Shepherd and the Lost Sheep, and I don't think you should lie to people" (47). Diane describes the agonizing death of her mother (from cancer) and relates her resentment as God refused to answer her prayers and end her mother's suffering. She further tells of being raped on her arrival home from the hospital on the day of her mother's death. For Diane, the events of her life do not correspond

to the "fixed" reality and belief system taught by Sister Mary. As Diane states: "I found I grew to hate you, Sister, for making me once expect everything to be ordered and make sense (48). Durang contrasts what Diane terms "intolerable randomness" with the neat and ordered (yet continually changing) view of existence propounded by the Catholic church.

The play's conclusion reinforces Durang's notion of randomness. Diane pulls a gun on Sister Mary, claiming that she "shouldn't be allowed to teach children" (50). Sister Mary similarly removes her own pistol and shoots Diane. As Diane dies, her former teacher states: "For those non-Catholics present, murder is allowable in self-defense, one doesn't even have to tell it in confession" (50). She also kills Gary once she believes she can send him to heaven; he has not sinned since attending morning confession and is thus free of mortal sin. In the final moment of the play she hands the gun over to Thomas, who points it at Aloysius. Sister Mary goes to sleep as Thomas recites doctrinal passages.

These events underscore Durang's indictment of the Catholic church and its promulgation of a "fixed" reality. Diane's desire to murder Sister Mary may appear logical given her disillusionment and deep hatred for the nun. What is neither logical nor expected is the fact that Sister Mary carries a gun. Nowhere in the dramatic text is this event foreshadowed; in the real

world one would not expect a nun to carry a pistol. The incident therefore reflects the randomness of the universe, confirming Diane's prior statement and its implicit nihilism. The strong irony is that this randomness emerges from the individual who claims all events are logical and ordered.

The final moments of Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You highlight both contradictions and ambiguities regarding multicultural principles and the transmission of cultural values. Durang suggests, through the conveyance of the pistol to Thomas, that Catholic dogma will continue to be passed from generation to generation. The final words of Thomas, which describe the perfections of God as eternal, all-good, all-present, and Almighty, present a firm belief in the rigid doctrines of the Catholic faith. The non-pluralistic cultural values have been preserved. The complexity of the ending intensifies since we recognize that Thomas' adherence to the doctrine may not continue in his personal future; as Diane once turned against a doctrine in which she firmly believed, so too may Thomas. Durang structures his work to demonstrate both the potential danger of indoctrination in a singular cultural value system and the fact that, over time, beliefs of individuals may change.

In conclusion, Durang demonstrates a paradox within the multicultural argument. We must recognize, however,

that Sister Mary's support of the cultural standards appears somewhat extreme; she fails to recognize any reality outside the given cultural framework. Nevertheless many who do not advocate multicultural approaches to education (such as Ravitch), use this paradox for argument, claiming that, within the isolated educational units which emphasize the value of individual cultural heritage, antagonism toward or ignorance of other cultures develops. As Paul Berman describes:

And sooner or later, according to these accusations, problems that are political and social, and not just educational, will come . . . and the United States will break up into a swarm of warring Croatias and Serbias. "Deculturation prefigures disintegration," in James Atlas's sardonic phrase (3).

The question which the play begs is whether or not intolerance of other cultures or belief systems as part of one's own cultural heritage is acceptable under multicultural principles. Catholic education is designed to preserve a cultural heritage--a "positive" under the multicultural argument--which denies the validity of other belief systems--a "negative". The question remains as to what the play implies about other culturally based instructional systems, such as those grounded in ethnic or gender based curriculum. On the surface, these systems may not appear as intolerant as the Catholic belief system depicted by Durang, yet, inherent in the fact that they are designed to preserve a given culture, they would tend to advocate selected cultural principles.

The question which the play also opens concerns the definition of cultural units within the multicultural umbrella. Although religion is currently not thought of as generating cultures under the current multicultural framework, the Catholic church has an historical background as an object of discrimination. Few today object to Catholic schools. Does historical discrimination lend credence to a cultural unit under the multicultural umbrella? At what other points are the lines drawn? For example, if believers in a non-Western religion, such as Islam (which has a clear heirarchical structure assigning women specific roles in society) desired an education grounded in their unique culture, would the general social order sanction it? Durang's play begins to open up, if not answer, these issues of pluralism and intolerance.

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CHAPTER SIX
ANOTHER ANTIGONE: "CULTURAL LITERACY" AND THE CANON

Durang's work presented an educational institution designed for the preservation of religious values. In A.R. Gurney's 1988 drama Another Antigone the college represents a parallel concept, as the depicted institution is designed to serve a select population; the college portrays a homogenous group of white, upper-class students and professors engaging in intellectual activity based upon the traditional canon. In this rather exclusionary context, students learn, in the famous words of Matthew Arnold, "the best that has been thought and said." That Gurney writes of such an institution is not surprising; he is best known for "his witty, mildly satirical portraits of upper middle-class New Englanders" and depicts "this society as gradually losing its once formidable power and privilege" (Contemporary Literary Criticism 215). Such works as The Dining Room, in which an ornate dining room serves as a metaphor for the change in American values, and The Cocktail Hour, where a playwright seeks emotional support from his affluent family, demonstrate Gurney's continual commitment to depictions of an upper class life-style and privilege.

The conflict of Another Antigone develops between a professor of classics, Henry Harper, and his student, Judy Miller. Through the work Gurney presents education as a conservative force which does not challenge but

rather reinforces traditional perspectives and values. Unlike other works, which view conservatism as a source of oppression, Gurney depicts the traditional curriculum in an essentially positive light, implying that it animates thought and inspires excellence. This view echoes such contemporary educational critics as Allan Bloom, who writes in The Closing of the American Mind that "Men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time" (380). For Gurney, the demise of classical education (embodied in the figure of Harper) would not necessarily liberate creative thought but would inhibit inspiration and intellectual achievement. Gurney suggests, therefore, that benefits emerge from what would commonly be considered an "Eurocentric" approach to education. Yet Gurney also finds that, without an ability to change, such tradition cannot survive. Another Antigone therefore straddles a middle ground of multicultural principles, finding value in traditional Eurocentric material (which many attack as limiting and oppressive) yet recognizing a need for adaptation.

The college of Gurney's play represents what Dinesh D'Souza might describe as a "prestige school" where "impressive domes and arches give off a distinct aroma of money and tradition" (D'Souza 1). The set, according to Gurney, "should evoke the Greek revival architecture of a typical New England college" (4), aligning with the concept of New England as the country's traditional

and historical center of private education. The play's two students, Judy and Dave, are white and come from a high socioeconomic background. The two educators, Harper and Diana, are also white and possess classical academic training. This context highlights higher education not as an apparatus for reaching the disenfranchised and marginalized classes, but as the exclusive domain of a very small, elite group of students. In the words of educational critic Roger Kimball, this form of liberal arts education looks "to the preservation and transmission of the best that had been thought and written as a means of rescuing culture from anarchy in a democratic society" (38).

The action is initiated when Judy, who is taking Harper's course on Greek tragedy, submits her term project, a modernized version of Antigone which addresses the issue of nuclear war. Harper does not accept the effort and asserts that Judy should write a paper on a subject from his approved topic list. Judy refuses; she instead decides to produce the play in order to convince Harper of its value and viability. By the conclusion of Gurney's work, we find that both parties experience personal dissatisfaction. Judy performs a revised and reworked version of her play only to discover the production has not generated the personal fulfillment she expected; she begins to question the value of her entire collegiate experience. Harper departs from the college under official

pressure. Conversely, Dave, Judy's boy friend, and Diana, Dean of the College and a personal friend of Harper, continue at the college. Dave and Diana possess an ability to adapt which permits their continued survival. Gurney may suggest that this adaptability is a trait necessary for the successful negotiation of modern life and its complexities. Nevertheless, as we shall see, he gives strong value to the passions of Harper and Judy, even though their inflexibility brings conflict.

Gurney's concept of tradition gives central position to the classical texts. Greek tragedy is certainly part of the traditional "canon," what Kimball defines as "the unofficial, shifting, yet generally recognized body of great works that have stood the test of time and are acknowledged to be central to a complete liberal arts education" (Kimball 1). The notion of a canon remains a contentious issue in the current debate over multiculturalism. Some view the traditional canon as positive. As literary and social critic Irving Howe states:

What is being invoked . . . is not a stuffy obeisance before dead texts from a dead past, but rather a critical engagement with living texts from powerful minds still very much 'active' in the present (Howe 61).

Others, such as Henry Louis Gates Jr, a humanities professor at Harvard, take a contrary position and view the canon as

the teaching of an esthetic and political order, in which no person of color, no woman,

was ever able to discover the reflection or representation of his or her cultural image or voice (Gates, 197).

In the latter view, the canon exists for transmission of existing values which marginalize minority cultures. Gurney depicts the canon as a positive force. Despite a basic stance in favor of the classics, however, Gurney implies that traditional education must make accommodations in order to survive.

Within the dramatic world of Another Antigone the collegiate institution claims to support both Harper and the canon. When Diana addresses a student assembly in the second scene of the play, she quotes Jane Austen to deflect criticism aimed against the traditional curriculum (apparently derided by corporate officials conducting interviews on campus). The traditional texts are where "the best powers of the mind and displayed, in the best chosen language" (17). Diana furthermore argues that courses which teach this material simply are "the best." She continues:

And we've no reason to justify, for example, Professor Harper's course on Greek tragedy. It deals with the best. It exists. It is there. And will remain there, among several other valuable requirements, for what we hope is a very long time (17).

While Gurney establishes the institution's nominal commitment to Harper (and his courses), as the play progresses we see that the college will praise tradition

while simultaneously adapting its position for its own well-being and survival.

Gurney, through the continual application of the Antigone metaphor both within the text and as an external reference, creates a work which depends on a knowledge of Sophocles' text for a full appreciation of his modern play and its parallels. Not only does Gurney emphasize the value of the Western cultural heritage inside his text, he also mandates audience knowledge of the canon for full appreciation of his work. The play thus acts as a self-reinforcing mechanism to depict its theme. However, this mechanism serves as an exclusionary device as well. Those who do not know of Sophocles will not fully appreciate Gurney's effort. Knowledge of the canon permits understanding; lack of knowledge creates exclusion. Since multicultural principles suggest control of discourse as power, Gurney's play ironically upholds this principle through creating an exclusionary work. This application of a literary metaphor evokes the strong public controversy surrounding E.D. Hirsch and his concept of "cultural literacy." In the introduction to his book Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know Hirsch states that "to be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world" (xiii). The fundamental principle rests upon the idea that a common core of knowledge

and facts should be known by every American. As he states:

Almost everybody knows what is meant by "dollar" and that cars must travel on the right-hand side of the road. But this elementary level of information is not sufficient to allow us to read newspapers . . . and it's isn't sufficient to achieve economic fairness and high productivity. (19)

The controversy surrounding Hirsch's viewpoint stems from his creation of a compendium of this basic information. The list has been accused of both avoiding non-Western concepts and simplifying education by defining learning as mere memorization of a series of disconnected facts. As Jim Cummins writes:

Needless to say, the cultures, knowledge, and values of groups that have been historically subordinated by the dominant group are notable absent from the list of "facts" that the "culturally literate" American needs to know. (xvii)

We must also note that, although Gurney attempts to establish parallels between Harper/Creon and Judy/Antigone, the context in which the conflict appears--an elite college setting--is quite narrow and limiting. Critics have noted that this setting provides an ironic diminishment to the action, whose tragic themes and metaphors want to invoke a broad sense of humanity and fate. Frank Rich's comment typifies the critical commentary of the original production: "The Creon-Antigone like clash between Harper and Judy is more a juvenile

war of stubborn wills than a battle royal over communal obligation and private conscience" (369).

The concept of canon as tradition connects with Gurney's portrayal of the university classroom as a self-contained entity controlled by the professor; this approach has indeed proved the traditional form of instruction within the university for centuries. We infer that Harper utilizes a lecture format, instructs and grades in a disciplined manner, assigns set readings, and announces writing assignments in a clear, specified manner. When Judy files a formal complaint concerning Harper's failure to accept her assignment, the Grievance Committee votes against her. As Diana remarks, "The committee felt you were asking them to violate the integrity of the classroom . . . to intrude on a principle that goes back to the Middle Ages" (36). Harper's grading system does not seem to issue from any personal thrust for power; he believes that this encourages command of the material. Indeed, he never declares that he will fail Judy (which would be within his professorial authority) but rather that he will assign her a grade of "incomplete."

Along with the centrality given the "canon," the first scene reveals Judy's Jewish identity. Judy mentions her ethnicity only in a casual sense; it is not in the forefront of her consciousness. At this juncture Harper himself is unaware of her ethnic background, and the

revelation appears tangential to the conflict. However, Judy's later attempts to understand and wrestle with a growing sense of ethnic awareness place her in direct conflict with Harper's classicism and its fixed perspective of world order.

For Harper, the conversation with Judy is routine. He has received several revisions of Antigone throughout the years. He shows Judy versions written during and about the McCarthy era, the Civil Rights movement, and the Vietnam War. Given his commitment to tradition, we infer that he handled those students as he now deals with Judy. Harper fully expects Judy's ultimate acquiescence.

Gurney also structures the work to depict Judy's initial position as invalid. Judy is undisciplined and uncommitted. Not only has she missed classes and failed to obtain the lecture notes, she has not even asked Harper's approval of her project (he requested that all non-authorized topics be approved by him, suggesting at least his willingness to listen). Harper's requirement that the paper conform to his specifications does not appear unreasonable; he seems to be a professor committed to insuring that his students learn.

Furthermore, we see in excerpts from Judy's Antigone (she and Dave rehearse various sequences) that Harper is accurate when he states her script reads like a "juvenile polemic on current events" (7). For both

Gurney and Harper, the lines of Judy's play demonstrate little understanding of the complexities and resonances of meaning in Greek tragedy. For example, in Judy's text, when Lysander (she selected the name because it is Greek; she does not care that it is generally associated with Shakespeare) addresses Antigone, he states:

Much as I've loved you, even since freshman year, and lived with you since the second semester of sophomore, built you a loft for our bed in off-campus housing, prepared your pasta, shared your stereo, still I have fears about what you've just proposed. The risks are too great, the payoff too insignificant.
(13)

In a similar vein, Judy's Antigone later states:

And yet this stupid arms race appalls me!
God, it makes me mad! It's as if the United States and Soviet Russia were two small boys comparing penises with the fate of the world dependent on the outcome. (26)

Harper's opinion appears justified. By any reasonable educational standard, her work appears inadequate and shallow.

Yet, when Judy's revised Antigone is presented to the student body (an event we do not witness), the performance is greatly acclaimed. She wins the college's Peabody Prize in part for "her fascinating contemporary version of Sophocles' Antigone" (59). Even Harper admits that, after seeing a rehearsal, he "admired" her work. Judy's version no doubt changed and improved significantly from her original attempt. This development coincides with the shift in thematic emphasis from nuclear war

to anti-Semitism. In this instance, Judy shows the ability to change and grow. Harper, however, does not understand the necessity for change, as evidenced in his final remark to Judy, which, as we shall soon see, undercuts the positive aspects of the tradition he advocates.

For Harper, admiration for the canon--represented by the Greek classics--represents the focal point of his existence. His life is driven by the need to teach Greek tragedy, with a belief that this instruction will better his students. This commitment explains his initial position on refusing Judy's project; to do so would, in his words, "endorse" the fact that Judy does not understand the concept of Greek tragedy and therefore has no tragic vision. As he states:

Tragedy means the universe is unjust and unfair . . . and if we learn that, and if I can teach that, if I can give these bright, beady-eyed students at least a glimmer of that, then perhaps we will . . . create a common community against this darkness. (17)

He also reveals: "I know a great deal, and I have to teach what I know, and I'm only good when I'm teaching it! . . . I have to teach . . . Have to. Or I'm dead" (47). Harper demonstrates full recognition of his own need to teach Greek tragedy; he demonstrates the knowledge that this teaching not only benefits students, it benefits himself through providing strength and value to his existence.

Harper fails to understand that the world around him changes. He does not adapt to a shifting environment and chooses to perceive life from a constant and fixed viewpoint. His continual reliance upon Greek metaphor to characterize individuals and events demonstrates this locked perspective, as he recasts everything in terms of Greek culture. He compares Diana's eyes to "beacons 'cross the Hellespont" (14). He adds that the administration has made her "cruel as Clytemnestra" (15). When learning of Dave's participation on the track team, he notes that "the Greek invented competitive sport" (34). His obsession to tradition distorts any valid perception of the real world; multiculturalists would view Harper as an example of the "Eurocentric" figure who cannot perceive the complexities of pluralistic and diverse society. When Harper compares a weekend he spent with Diana to "Dido and Aeneas in their enchanted cave," Diana explodes in response: "Dido, Penelope, Clytemnestra! I am not a myth, Henry! I am not a metaphor" (43). She claims that he, in fact, knows nothing about her real life. She concludes: "In your mind, everything is an example of something else" (44). Gurney creates in Harper an individual for whom the contemporary world does not exist except as a reflection of the Greek order. Gurney thus implies that the canon may limit as well as inspire.

Harper's preoccupation with the past and disregard of the present open him to the accusation that he is anti-Semitic. He perceives the world as an opposition between, in his own words, "two fundamental themes in Western culture: the Greek and the Hebraic" (20). His casual conversation may appear anti-Semitic, but it in fact only reflects the dualistic manner in which he interprets the world. Diana relates an incident in which Henry told a Jewish joke in a curriculum meeting. He thought it a "good joke" while others found it offensive. When he takes a stance against Israel by observing "how we let one small country so totally dominate our foreign policy," (19) he expresses an honest opinion which harbors no inherent prejudice. His comment that that Jews raise their children to feel "entitled" is presented as an observed fact rather than a statement of malice. Diana directly expresses Gurney's attitude toward Harper. When Harper asks if she believes him prejudiced, she states "I think you're a passionate teacher and scholar, whose lectures are overloaded with extravagant analogies occasionally misinterpreted by Jewish students" (20).

While Harper's comments are not designed to be malicious, they demonstrate a certain insensitivity. He does not recognize that, throughout the years, attitudes have changed. Prejudices which were once commonly expressed in both formal and informal settings (such as the

segregation of races prior to 1954) are now considered abhorrent. The institution recognizes this reality and demonstrates a willingness to act. The provost considers cancelling Harper's courses due to their lack of enrollment (a budget crisis within the college cannot be doubted since classes in other departments also are being cancelled.) Nevertheless, as Diana admits, there is the perception that Harper's general attitude toward Jews is "problematic." Were Harper to continue to teach, it is implied that tensions could spread beyond the immediate academic setting to involve alumni, trustees, and donors, thereby threatening the institution and its financial health. As we will later see, Gurney intimates that this "concern" for the institution may not necessarily be in the best interest of the students.

It is important to note that Harper's direct remarks do not spur Judy to revise her Antigone. Only after the Dean relates that others have accused Harper of anti-Semitism does Judy alter her version. Prior to the revision, when Diana and Judy are discussing her grade, Diana asks Judy if she believes Harper to be anti-Semitic. Judy dismisses the claim, stating "it's probably that Talmudic type who sits in the front row and argues about everything" (39). She also confides "I never even thought of it" (39). Gurney makes it clear that Judy does not perceive Harper as anti-Semitic until the Dean prompts the thought.

What may be concluded from Judy's revision and its emphasis on the theme of anti-Semitism? The sudden emergence of Judy's ethnic consciousness may appear insincere, since Judy demonstrates little ethnic awareness prior to her conflict with Harper. Her actions could be considered self-serving. In this light, Judy links herself to a cultural unit--generated by her Jewish background--in order to draw discrimination charges against Harper, thereby avoiding any personal responsibility for her failure. Such an interpretation aligns with what Dinesh D'Souza has deemed "victim status":

By converting victimhood into a certificate of virtue, minorities acquire a powerful moral claim that renders their opponents defensive and apologetic, and immunizes themselves from criticism and sanction (243).

Such an interpretation is reinforced when we recognize that not only has Judy failed to exhibit any deep ethnic consciousness, within the play Gurney has not depicted Jews as marginalized. Both Judy and Diana (who is also Jewish) appear accepted within the institution and by their colleagues.

However, this interpretation oversimplifies several key issues. While the initial impulse for Judy's ethnic consciousness may have emerged from external suggestion, she demonstrates increased commitment to her work. She works diligently in rewriting the play, the efforts culminating in a performance which helps her win a prestigious award. Judy lacks this commitment and degree

of conscientiousness in her initial encounter with Harper. Furthermore, the portions of her revised work which Gurney permits us to see demonstrate a deeper understanding and complexity of thought than appeared in her prior sophomoric efforts. In an excerpt from Judy's new Antigone, we find questions of Jewish consciousness linked with issues of imprisonment, oppression, and the nuclear arms race (47). Gurney therefore demonstrates how a new interpretation of a "classic" may educate and broaden the intellectual experience of the individuals engaged in the project. The canon, if interpreted in a contemporary manner and aligned with personal commitment, frees the thought process rather than confines it. Note that the interpretations of Harper and Judy are similar since both attach an extraordinary personal value to the Antigone myth, yet different since Harper's perspective evinces a fixed and unchanging commitment to the original Sophocles while Judy's relates the myth to the contemporary environment.

Even Harper, in his final confrontation with Judy, admits he "admired" her work. He states that the play "demonstrated an earnestness and commitment" which he finds "refreshing, in a world which seems too often concerned with only the meaning of meaning" (50). This scene demonstrates Gurney's belief that the failure of the old order to adapt will result in its destruction. Since the provost threatens to cancel Harper's classes

unless his enrollment increases, he asks Judy to encourage students in her production to sign up for his course next fall, a seminar in Greek literature which will be "project-oriented." Judy agrees to enlist the students. At this juncture Gurney suggests a new synthesis. Harper is willing to change his methods in order to survive; this change would have been unlikely had he not seen Judy's play. He begins to respect the fact that the canon can be seen in an alternate light, evoking responses and expressions which may not necessarily align with his own perspective. In turn, Judy agrees to encourage the students. Were she to consider Harper a true anti-Semite, she would desire his removal from the classroom. When Harper offers Judy a "B" on her project, stating "Let's reserve the A's for Sophocles, shall we?" (52), she accepts. She states: "I guess a B from you is like an A from anyone else" (53). She no longer merely quests for a grade but begins to understand Harper's commitment for excellence, as he begins to understand the individuality of her perspective. A sense of mutual respect emerges. They move toward a center position in which the inspiration of excellence provided by the traditional canon merges with contemporary interpretation.

This center, however, is undercut by Harper's final remark. The fact emerges that had Harper not given Judy a grade, Professor Birnbaum could have given Judy an "A" for her play, reregistering the project under

Special Topics. Judy states that she didn't need to see Harper; she only wanted his opinion of her play. When Harper hears the name "Birnbaum," he states that "Once again, Athens is forced to bow to Jerusalem," while adding that "the Chosen People always choose to intrude" (55). Judy interprets these comments as anti-Semitic and departs in rage, declaring that she will recommend the course to no one; she will take the "A" from Birnbaum. Harper undermines the attenuated center position by failing to recognize the possible implications of his remarks. For him, the remarks represent a natural response to Judy's revelations. Despite repeated warnings from the Dean and Provost, Harper's continued failure to adapt results in his downfall.

At the conclusion of the play Harper quits the institution. His final class lecture conveys his self-perception. When discussing Creon (which we understand to be a self-reference) he states: "And so he banishes himself from his own city. His Polis. He goes. He disappears. He leaves the stage, forever doomed now to wander far from the only community he knows, self-exiled and alone" (59). He still has not changed, viewing himself through a Greek metaphor. Judy also concludes in a similar position of malaise. She breaks her relationship with Dave since he will not acknowledge Harper's anti-Semitism. She declines the cash award for the Peabody Prize and

leaves the awards ceremony in confusion. She confesses: "I don't feel good about my life anymore. I don't feel good about my country. I can't accept all the stuff that going on these days" (60).

The work ends in personal unhappiness for both Harper and Judy. The departure of Harper from the educational sphere destroys his personal existence since it was tied to teaching the classics. Future students will not have the opportunity to learn from or be affected by him. Despite the fact that he plays no direct role in Judy's production, his initial decision--refusal to accept the paper--served as a catalyst for Judy's decision to perform the work. In an ironic fashion, his perceived anti-Semitism sparks Judy to revise her work to a level of quality which even he admires. Judy's quest for excellence is therefore entwined with both the positive and negative aspects of Harper. Without him in the system, Gurney suggests that other students will lack opportunity to grow by reacting to the multiple aspects of his personality.

The two individuals who remain at the end of the play, Diana and Dave, chart a middle ground between Harper and Judy. Gurney suggests that if committed extremes destroy each other, a center may survive. Neither Dave nor Diana exist as purely traditional figures nor as full-blown radicals. They represent "balanced" individuals. Dave's philosophy and temperament exist

in a median position. While he ends up deciding to major in the classics, he nonetheless demonstrates an understanding of contemporary concerns. Though his affection for Judy is genuine, he retains his own sense of self-worth such that he does not back down when he believes Judy is wrong (as when she accuses Harper of anti-Semitism). Diana also exists within a central realm. Her background is academic, similar to that of Harper. She would have voted against Judy in the Grievance Committee: Harper's academic freedom is paramount to her. Yet she also assists Judy. She permits Judy to use the theatre. (Harper labels Diana a "traitor" for this action). She views the possible cancellation of Harper's classes as beneficial for the institution, despite its personal effect on him.

In conclusion, Gurney finds positive support for the traditional canon, suggesting that it can inspire individuals. Since the depicted canon is Eurocentric, under the multicultural argument it reinforces those structures and patterns of thought which continue to marginalized selected groups. In this instance, where a white male teaches the canon to students of high socioeconomic background, those who advocate multiculturalism would take a strong stand against Gurney's position, due both to the curriculum and the institution which serves as an exclusionary vehicle for Eurocentric dominance.

Gurney, however, highlights the necessity for adaptation of tradition. Despite the positive conservatism which Harper represents, he is demonstrated as an individual who cannot cope with a changing environment. Those who advocate multiculturalism would support this perspective, which suggests that change is necessary within the traditional order so that diverse perspectives may be accommodated.

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CHAPTER SEVEN
OLEANNA: LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND THE DYNAMICS OF POWER

The initial works in this study focused upon marginalized cultural units in opposition to a dominant order. The last two works served to self-examine selected cultures without explicit acknowledgement of this dialectic. Each of these works has postulated the existence of a valid cultural unit, what MacArthur Fellow Paul Berman identifies as "the identity-politics idea that in cultural affairs, the single most important way to classify people is by race, ethnicity, and gender" (13). David Mamet's latest work, Oleanna, subjugates this concept of cultural identification by finding it a secondary consideration before a primal struggle for possession of power. The two character piece, which opened in New York on October 25, 1992 and was directed by Mamet himself, explores the savage confrontation between John, a university professor, and Carol, his student. In his essay on the works of David Mamet, Pascale Hubert-Lieblier writes: "Within the teacher-student paradigm, Mamet can probe and expose the motivations and the finalities underlying the exercise of power" (69). While Hubert-Lieblier refers to informal and non-institutional relationships (such as that of Bob and Teach in American Buffalo), his observation cuts to the thematic core of the new Mamet work.

Critical reaction to Oleanna has varied. Frank Rich states that the work is as "likely to provoke more arguments than any play this year" (354), while Clive Barnes labels the production a "deadly pretentious plop" (359). Jeremy Gerard writes:

it's Mamet who has gone wild, with a tense, condensed play that exploits the war raging on campuses today between advocates of diversity and defenders of free speech (353).

While Gerard's comments address the surface aspects of the piece--allegations of sexual harassment in a university setting--the work's broader focus is the dynamics of power. Christine A. Sleeter has commented that "Power is often conceived as a commodity one either has or lacks" (14). Mamet makes possession of this commodity the singular item by which the characters define themselves. If multicultural education is, as some (such as Sleeter and Cummins) suggest, a quest for empowerment by the marginalized against a dominant order, Oleanna depicts a reductionist version of this struggle, in which power is the only value and both language and cultural identification are used as tools and weapons to maintain or gain this value. Within power relationships:

there are winners and losers; winners get the power, the means to do as they choose and to define their own actions and those of others. Losers get destroyed or devalued or otherwise reduced in status (12).

The first act of Oleanna provides exposition, establishes the initial power relationship between John and Carol, and presents the elements that will drive the unforeshadowed movements of the second act. The nondescript office functions as a confining physical environment, a metaphorical arena in which neither character leaves the stage during the course of the action. This inability to exit evinces a zero-sum, closed system in which the possession of power may shift but total victory is an impossibility. The institution as well is nondescript; although clearly one of higher education, we cannot determine whether its constituent scope is narrow (such as the elite educational institution of Gurney) or wider (such as the college in Open Admissions). The indistinctness of office and institution parallel the ambiguity which will ultimately drive the play's action; as we shall see, this ambiguity renders any mutually agreeable interpretation of the events of the text difficult to achieve.

The initial power relationship is established when the curtain rises. John controls. Carol sits in the professor's office as he talks on the telephone about the purchase of a new house. Though she has arrived to discuss her difficulties in his course, she must wait for the completion of his personal business. When he finishes, he attempts to dismiss Carol; her concerns remain secondary to his self-interested economic pursuit.

After several fits and starts at conversation, the action shifts when Carol admits that she sees herself as a complete failure. John decides to speak with and confide in her, confessing his own past feelings of inadequacy in the educational environment. Though his emotional tone changes to one of apparent sympathy and compassion, John continues to dominate. Even when he permits Carol to express herself, he routes the conversation. Note how he directs the following exchange. John has provided a metaphor about a pilot crashing a plane; Carol attempts to understand it.

Carol: (Pause): [The pilot] could just

John: That's right.

Carol: He could say:

John: My attention wandered for a
moment . . .

Carol: . . . uh huh . . .

John: I had a thought I did not like
. . . but now:

Carol: . . .but now it's . . .

John: That's what I'm telling you. (18)

This interchange typifies the dialogue within the first act. John controls the interaction, not only through choosing the subjects of conversation, but also by guiding Carol's thought process.

The sense of John's power is reinforced when we recognize Mamet's depiction of education as an institution in which the professor has complete formal authority. John designs curriculum, assigns grades, and can "break" the rules if he desires. He offers Carol an "A" if she returns to his office to discuss the course material.

He states: "What's important is that I awake your interest, if I can, and that I answer your questions" (26). The statement affirms his belief in his dominance. He has the ability to answer her questions, reflecting a possession of knowledge which she lacks. He acknowledges the importance of stimulating her interest, suggesting psychological control through influence over her personal inquisitiveness. We must note that John has written the textbook which he assigns for the course; not only does he control the flow of information, he has full dominion over the source of information itself.

John also explicitly states his view of higher education:

I say college education, since the war, has become so a matter of course, and such as fashionable necessity, for those either of or aspiring to the new vast middle class, that we espouse it, as a matter of right, and have ceased to ask "What is it good for?" (33)

Despite being a member of an educational institution which grants him privilege, he questions its value, and, indeed, mocks it. His sense of dominance permits him to express antagonism toward the very system which provides him power. As he states of the Tenure Committee (which has announced his tenure but not yet officially granted it), "They had people voting on me I wouldn't employ to wax my car" (23). His opening speech at the beginning of Act Two amplifies his position. He remarks that tenure is a positive link between the

"Material"--economic advantage--and teaching. If, as he states, he "loves" teaching (44), then education serves for total personal satisfaction. His economic, personal, and social well-being is derived from a system which he derides.

The first act concludes with John's imminent departure for a party celebrating his tenure. If John stands in a superior position in the first act, Carol appears subordinate. Her behavior is marked by acquiescence and compliance. As a student, she appears to make a good faith effort to understand John's instruction; she attends class, takes notes, and reads the text. As an individual, her demeanour suggests one who lacks both self-confidence and an ability to articulate her needs. Not only does John control the conversational agenda, Carol appears to be somewhat "dim" for a college student. She seems confused by the word "index" and claims not to know the word "predilection." She also becomes flustered when John makes the simple suggestion that she attempt to understand the charts within his book. The power structure is clear; John dominates Carol.

The second act of Oleanna consists of two scenes; in the first, we see that Carol has made an official accusation of sexual harassment against John based upon the events of the first act. Though Mamet clearly has established John in a position of formal and informal authority over Carol, the dialogue and stage directions

of Act One remain highly ambiguous regarding the sexual nuances which drive Carol's charges. Critical opinion of the New York production suggests that John is a victim of Carol's overreaction. Critic David Sterritt's response typifies much of the commentary:

Mamet could surely have injected some ambiguity into the first-scene encounter to make us wonder if Carol might later be correct about John's alleged "exploitation of asymmetrical power relations," to use a fashionable phrase. It's fascinating that Mamet doesn't allow himself--or his audience--the comfort such ambiguity would have provided. By any reasonable measure, Carol appears wrong about her charges.
(358)

Yet analysis of the written text does not imply this seemingly definitive encounter presented in New York. In production, the manner in which the on-stage depiction of the alleged harassment is handled in Act I will guide the thematic relevance of the second act. If John exhibits no sexual overtones, then Carol's charges prove vindictive (as in the original production), and John may be seen as a victim. If John projects a clear sexual intent, which would be in keeping with his general predilection for power, Carol's subsequent actions bespeak an injured party seeking a just redress of grievance.

The following sequence demonstrates the textual ambiguity. Carol asks John why he has remained to help her, while his party waits:

Carol: Why did you stay with me?
John: Stay here.
Carol: Yes. When you should have gone.

John: Because I like you.
Carol: You like me.
John: Yes.
Carol: Why?
John: Why? Well? Perhaps we're similar.
(20)

The text does not indicate the level of sexual suggestion. John's reading could range from one of nonchalance to one of strong sexual desire.

A similar moment occurs after Carol explodes in a burst of confusion and self-doubt. John "goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder" (36). Is this an innocent gesture of consolation, an act of seduction, or something in between? While a director and actors must address the level of John's sexual aggression, the text does not.

Furthermore, despite whatever actions and nuances are projected on stage, the interpretations of individual viewers will differ. Sexual harassment remains a subject which elicits continued social and legal redefinition. In her study on the issue in academic settings, Billie Wright Dziech states that there is a "cloud of confusion that exists--and is sometimes conveniently created--around what sexual harassment actually is" (17). The contentious debate surrounding the well publicized confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and the allegations of Anita Hill demonstrate the persistent difficulty involved in addressing this issue. Unlike the private and unseen interactions between Thomas and

Hill, the male/female interplay of Oleanna is actually presented for open inspection. When Thomas and Hill claimed the other was lying about events, no one could verify what had transpired between them. Here we see the actual event; Mamet thus forces the audience to interpret the actions.

Mamet further complicates the issue since the harassment charge of Carol affects a change in the power structure. Regardless of whether or not John's words and actions possess a sexual motivation, he nonetheless controls the power within the first act. If one views John as excessively dominant, then is the veracity of the charges relevant if the single objective is to remove his power? Some may argue that the reduction in John's power may be justified by whatever means are necessary. This fundamental desire to challenge the dominant power network has been suggested as the reason Anita Hill's charges ultimately exploded with such vehemence into the public arena. Some believe that, since Thomas was a conservative who was about to be approved to a lifetime position, the "liberal" camp took whatever steps necessary in order to discredit him and to deny him the bench. As L. Gordon Crovitz writes in Clarence Thomas: Confronting the Future:

As the hours approached for the final vote, liberal special interest groups busily made blind phone calls to people who had worked with Justice Thomas, seeking any information that could be used against him. Even Senator

Howard Metzenbaum admitted on the Senate floor that his staff had made many calls looking for anything they could find to help to defeat the nomination. (15)

This factual example of the events surrounding the confirmation of Thomas suggests that allegations of sexual harassment may not necessarily be limited to the impropriety of the event itself but may be taken up as a tool for asserting or denying broader power. This use of allegation distorts the line between honest searches for justice and a quest for power, since, once allegations are recognized as a possible tool to achieve power, the rationale behind the charges comes into question. Distinguishing between calls for justice and desires for disruption of the power network therefore becomes difficult, discrediting those who do in fact seek retribution for what they believe are just grievances.

In the first scene of Act Two, the center of power begins to shift from John to Carol. If we view Mamet's work as one in which the quest for power defines the action, we see two principles at work in the character of Carol that align with methods applied by multicultural education to encourage the entrance of marginalized cultures into power networks. Carol's heightened ability to use and control language reinforces the concept of the use of discourse as a means of achieving one's aims. Carol's alignment with a campus "group" furthers the notion of individuals bonding together for empowerment, and her shift in character, from passive to aggressive,

indicates a growing willingness of subordinates to challenge those who are perceived to be in positions of authority and control. Oleanna therefore highlights the parallels between the nature of achieving power and multicultural education. The use of language, group alignment, and a willingness to confront the dominant order are fundamental tools of both multicultural education and the desire for power.

Mamet demonstrates both the ambiguity of language and its capacity for use as a method to obtain power.

As professor Robin Tolmach Lakoff notes:

Words become powerful because they can be used as tools; like a hammer or a gun, they don't make changes by themselves, but through a human being's use of them, skillfull or clumsy. (15)

Carol reframes and restructures John's words from Act One to depict him in an unfavorable light. For example, John relates an anecdote in the opening act: "When I was young, somebody told me, are you ready, the rich copulate less often than the poor. But when they do, they take more of their clothes off" (32). He relates the "joke" in a broad account of his personal educational experience; within the moment, the anecdote does not appear to be either sexually aggressive or the point of John's argument. In Carol's report to the Tenure Committee, however, she claims the tale as part of a pattern of his sexually aggressive attitude, declaring that the professor "told a rambling, sexually

explicit story, in which the frequency and attitudes of fornication of the poor and the rich are, it would seem, the central point" (43). Carol alters the context of John's words to her advantage. In regard to the sequence where John remarks that he "likes" Carol, she writes: "He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me'. He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office" (48). By framing John's words within the allegation of sexual harassment, Mamet demonstrates the development of Carol's ability to manipulate language to further her objectives. As a playwright, Mamet often addresses the use of language. As theatre scholar Anne Dean notes, within Mamet's plays "language has become a weapon with which to attack a threatening world, a way of sustaining confidence and building security" (222). Language functions as a tool to maintain or change patterns of dominance and subordination, not to communicate "truth" or "facts." As Lakoff notes, "Language is the initiator and interpreter of power relations" (13).

Carol also demonstrates a willingness to challenge John regarding his own use of language. She directly confronts her professor:

John: . . . I'm always looking for
a paradigm for . . .
Carol: I don't know what a paradigm
is.
John: It's a model.
Carol: Then why can't you use that
word? (45)

Carol demonstrates recognition that John's language fosters his continued dominance. Lakoff comments upon the use of language within university settings, stating that

by any stylistic standards, the university's prose is inelegant. Indeed, some would call it abysmal--turgid, pompous, inflated, impenetrable, closing off understanding rather than furthering it. (146)

She continues to link this language with the preservation of power.

It's not that there's no need to be intelligible. It's that there's a need not to. Our power, our authority, is intertwined with our ability to maintain secrets even as we seem to dispense them. We write and speak, but we do not communicate. That is our art. (146)

It is not coincidental that in the final scene of the play, when Carol demonstrates the most aggression and power, she uses words which seem far beyond her initial vocabulary: "prerogative," "protective heirarchy," "capricious." As Dean writes, within Mamet's drama "the very structure of the play reflects its linguistic strategy" (15).

Carol also has aligned herself with a campus "group," whose composition cannot be definitively determined (although we infer it to be some sort of women's organization). This alignment coincides with an increase in Carol's aggression and subsequent acquisition of power. Two theories of cultural identification, described by education professor Lee Anne Bell, reflect upon the

apparently non-coincidental increase in Carol's power and group alignment. The first, derived from the feminist experience in the early 1970s, was

a process by which individual women explored their experiences in a supportive group and through naming their problems and concerns collectively were able to see the way in which what appears as an individual's problem are faced by all women in a patriarchal system. Through such insights, consciousness of the oppressive socialization and institutional power relations in the culture was heightened, thus opening new possibility for collective action. (230)

Though Bell refers to the raising of female consciousness, it is readily apparent that this process of sharing thoughts as a method toward empowerment can apply equally to other marginalized groups who believe themselves dominated by the social structure.

The second source to which she refers is Freire's concept of 'conscientization,'

by which people who are oppressed work collectively to name, analyze, and change the conditions in their lives . . . the act of naming reality collectively is a means of taking power over it and claiming the right to challenge oppressive conditions. (230)

Both theoretical frames emphasize the importance of group identity and collective thought binding together for empowerment purposes.

Carol's alignment with a group may serve to explain the difference between her character in the two acts. Whereas in Act One she appears acquiescent, reticent, and incapable of self-expression, in Act Two she emerges

as assertive and unwilling to accede to John. Carol views her positions as motivated by the group. Her interchangeable use of "I" and "we" suggests a merging of personal and group identity. She views the charges as no longer her own: "My group may withdraw its complaint" (72). "My group has told your lawyer we may pursue criminal charges" (78). However, Mamet never explicitly designates this alignment as the reason for the change in Carol's character. Some critics have suggested, based upon the vast difference in personality and vocabulary, that Carol may have been "playing dumb" in Act One to set up John for these allegations. Reviewer Alisa Solomon describes Carol as

a stammering imbecile in the first scene .
 . . the student has become an articulate little Maoist in the second. Did she concoct the whole thing with her group? Was it a conspiracy from the beginning? (355)

We must recognize, however, that in this play, Carol's alignment with the group, and, indeed, the group itself, may not be a valid effort to demarginalize but rather a simple effort to obtain individual and personal power. Unlike characters in other works we have examined, which clearly have depicted individuals as marginalized due to their identification as members of a specific "cultural" unit, the reason for Carol's subordinate position in Act One is ambiguous. If her reticence is not a "set-up" (as Solomon suggests), is it due to cultural alignment, or merely a reflection of her own individual personality?

We do not get the distinct sense that Mamet intends for Carol to stand as a symbol or metaphor for broader cultural units. Certainly Carol is a woman, commonly identified as a marginalized group under the multicultural umbrella. Mamet provides hints she views herself as economically disadvantaged, another group commonly considered marginalized. Yet we never sense Carol as marginalized because of these cultural factors. In fact, if marginalization is defined as being decentered solely due to the group to which one belongs, we can never definitively assert that Carol is "marginalized" at all. John's dominance and Carol's acquiescence could be considered to emerge from their individual personalities and not from any external, cultural factors. Even though the basic student/teacher relationship may be one of formal power, Carol's reticence and John's arrogance appear to go beyond the "normal" parameters for such a relationship. Therefore, when Carol aligns herself with a group, we are uncertain whether the unnamed group is in fact marginalized or merely serves as a vehicle to achieve personal power. As allegations may function as a quest for justice or a desire for power, so too may group alignment and, by extension, specific cultural identification. The initial scene of Act Two concludes with John grabbing Carol in an attempt to prevent her from leaving the office; this action prefigures the violence which will conclude the work and, indeed,

exemplifies John's increasing frustration with the changes in the power structure.

In the play's final scene, Carol presents John an offer. If John agrees to promote the removal of certain books from the university curriculum (one of the books being his own), her group may withdraw its charges and thus forestall his dismissal from the university. He refuses. It is then disclosed that Carol has charged John with rape for blocking her attempt to leave the office at the end of the previous scene. At the conclusion of the work, John snaps; he physically attacks Carol. In the original production, this assault is apparently quite brutal. A quote from an interview with W.H. Macy, the actor who played John, highlights this point:

Asked if the actress is black-and-blue from the bashing she gets in the play, Macy replies "Not at all. That scene is so expertly crafted . . . that she doesn't get hurt. But it looks very scary from the audience. People sometimes scream "Oh, God, no." (Botto 40)

As the written text of Act One leaves John's sexual aggression in doubt, the rationale behind John's dismissal from the university also is ambiguous. Carol apparently has convinced the Tenure Committee of her accusations; she now calls them "facts" since they have been "proved" (62). Yet Mamet does not present any evidence of John's misbehavior, save the details of Carol's report. If the university discharges John based upon allegations

which cannot be verified--as John states in Act One, "There's no one here but you and me" (26)--Mamet suggests an university administration keen to appease groups which present charges without confirmable evidence. Under this interpretation, the view of the accused is accepted despite no independent verification; the concept of justice and fair hearing becomes undermined. On the other hand, Mamet does not discount the possibility that other evidence may have been offered; if this were so, John's behavior emerges as part of a pattern and his dismissal for misconduct appears valid. As an audience member or reader of the text, we cannot determine the information considered by the Tenure Committee.

Within the final sequence we begin to see Carol's full recognition of her power. Carol states that her organization finds those books she asks John to promote for withdrawal as "questionable." When she states that "Someone chooses the books. If you can choose them, others can" (74), she directly acknowledges the arbitrary selection of curriculum within the educational system, and, by extension, the concept of discourse as an arbitrary method of assigning power. This selection process reflects the multicultural perspective which finds that curriculum does not present an "objective truth" but rather maintains existing power structures. Carol's request attempts to destroy the "built-in curricular realities" noted by Rothenberg (identified in Chapter One). As Carol

states: "You have an agenda. We have an agenda" (79).
The core issue of Mamet's play is control.

Carol also claims that John now hates her because she has power. As she states: "It is the power that you hate. So deeply that any atmosphere of free discussion is impossible. It's not unlikely. It's impossible" (69). Carol demonstrates the understanding that power serves as the single defining factor in the struggle between them. She further states: "The thing which you find so cruel is the self same process of selection I, and my group, go through every day of our lives" (69). She continues: "But we worked hard to get to this school. (Pause.) And some of us. (Pause.) Overcame prejudices. Economic, sexual, you cannot begin to imagine" (69). Carol's enunciations of these principles function as contrast to those of John in Act One. Whereas John drew parallels between his own educational experience and that of Carol, she highlights the difference. Each comparison seeks control of the power network. For John to claim his educational experience is similar to that of Carol implies that she can overcome perceived failure; no alteration of the system is necessary since she will have the same opportunity for success as he had. His claim implies that if she does not achieve success, it is no one's fault but her own. Carol's suggestion of a different experience fosters a call for institutional change to equalize opportunities for

those individuals claiming to be members of marginalized groups. Her failure to achieve "success" would derive not from the self but from social structures which deny her opportunity. These attitudes align with two of four fundamental models of empowerment relationships identified by Sleeter in her introduction to her book Empowerment through Multicultural Education. The "moral model"

blames the victims by viewing persons as responsible for both their own problems and their solutions; the rest of society is absolved of responsibility, and the "have-nots" are supposed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps by problems presumed to be of their own making. (3)

The other model "directs us toward empowerment, viewing persons as victims of problems created by society but as potentially active solvers of their own problems" (3). It is clear that while John aligns with the first model, Carol aligns with the latter.

Thus far the play has depicted power as the defining factor which drives all alignments and interactions. The conclusion of the play fractures the shifting power dynamic and suggests mutual destruction. After John has requested that Carol leave his office, his wife calls him. In the ensuing conversation, John calls his wife "baby," to which Carol retorts: "Don't call your wife baby. You heard what I said" (79). He responds to Carol's attempt to assert power within his personal marriage not with "civilized" behavior but with violence and profanity. During the assault he tells Carol to

"get the fuck out of my office" and calls her a "vicious little bitch", a "little cunt" (79). As Carol's increase in linguistic skill reflected her ascent to power, John's profanity linguistically reflects the physical violence.

While assaulting Carol, John declares: "I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole" (79). Whether or not John demonstrated any previous sexual interest, his action here presents violence and destruction. This final act exemplifies Kate Millett's elucidation of the relationship between violence and power. According to Millett, if consent to an ideology is withdrawn, violence--that is, an active response to perpetuate the power structure which the ideology upholds--could occur. The threat of violence thus reinforces original consent. (Donovan 145). In Mamet's play, the ideology--John's dominance and power--is broken; John responds in violence.

What does Mamet's play imply about the principles underlying multiculturalism? Language and discourse are tools for achieving power; with an ability to manipulate these tools, attempts to attain power may succeed. Mamet therefore upholds the concept of discourse as a method for power and control. However, Mamet demonstrates that both parties are equally capable of manipulating language for their own objectives. Removal of the dominant discourse does not necessarily mean that another discourse has more validity, or, indeed,

any less desire for power than the original displaced discourse. Mamet reinforces Foucault's concept, identified in Chapter One, which declares that "there are no absolute true discourses, only more or less powerful ones" (78). The quest for power (if power is the only commodity of value) mandates use of any necessary tools; competing units may be equally adept at manipulation.

The use of language and discourse supports the multicultural concept that the ability to control the interpretation of events serves as a method for empowerment. As the arrival of Columbus in the "New World" may be interpreted from different perspectives to highlight specific issues or points of contention, so too are events within Oleanna. Carol views the action from one perspective. John views it from another. In performance, individuals within the audience will create their own interpretation. These viewpoints are further complicated; since language is a tool that can be used to distort rather than clarify, we possess no method to evaluate the true perceptions of Carol and John. Carol claims that John attacked her; does she really think so? John claims he is innocent of all charges; is this his true personal belief? Therefore not only perceptions, but language as a method to express perceptions renders any valid evaluation of events or motivations impossible. If all actions are driven by a quest for power, any verbal and written expressions

become suspect as a method to determine an individual's thoughts and motivations. Mamet's use of sexual harassment reinforces the ambiguities of language and perception, since the issue itself possesses a shifting and vague definition within contemporary American society.

Not only do language and perception become suspect, so too do claims of cultural identity. Mamet presents a situation in which the individual character may or may not be marginalized because of her placement in a cultural unit (as a woman, as economically disadvantaged). Her subsequent alignment with the campus "group" suggests a strong desire for empowerment but not necessarily a legitimate effort at demarginalization since she may not have been "marginalized" in the first place. Cultural identification thus may be used as a vehicle for accessing power networks and not necessarily for any genuine advancement of cultural consciousness.

Mamet's conclusion could be considered discomfoting to the multicultural argument. If multicultural education seeks empowerment, Mamet suggests that the existing power structure may select mutual destruction rather than concede the hegemony and accept a new power relationship. By extension, this destruction implies a no-win scenario for both individuals and groups who seek power. If they do not seek power, they continue to be subordinate. If they seek power and achieve it, the existing network will destroy rather than accept

a restructured power dynamic. True change may never occur since mutual destruction will result. For those who advocate multicultural education, indeed, for those who seek any change at all within power structures, Mamet's conclusion may prove disquieting.

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CONCLUSION

We have analyzed seven works of contemporary American drama and focused upon how they addressed the various principles underlying multiculturalism. What overall viewpoint emerges from the works? What commonalities and differences exist among the artistic and theatrical representations?

The collective perspective of the plays asserts a common conclusion: the educational system, as it currently functions, does not enhance opportunity for marginalized groups. This conclusion runs contrary to the common American perception of education, embodied in sociologist Susan A. Takata's declaration that "Education is one avenue which offers opportunities for success" (252). Set against the basic tenet of multicultural education that suggests education can foster social change, the cumulative artistic perspective of these works asserts that the influence of the general social order upon education is stronger than the influence of the educational system upon the social structures. Traditional structures and attitudes bind education and render it irrelevant as a vehicle for social reconstruction. As education currently exists, its value as a means of integrating cultures with the dominant social order is limited.

The works clearly demonstrate this conservative function of education which preserves existing social

structures. Wasserstein depicts women educated in an historical institution originally designed to preserve male dominance. Lauro suggests that the policy of open admissions, as actualized, continues to marginalize rather than integrate ethnic and lower class groups. The deaf within Medoff's work are isolated by a society unwilling to accommodate their needs; only when the deaf accede to the dominance of the hearing are they accepted. Durang demonstrates that the Catholic order seeks self-preservation through transmission of its own religious values. Gurney highlights positive aspects to continued instruction in the traditional Eurocentric canon. Mamet depicts the educational environment as a closed arena in which a continual power struggle occurs; the arena does not permit change.

We must recognize that the conservative nature of the educational system emerges regardless of stated motivations or actions. Some institutions consciously create a separatist environment, such as the deaf school (which isolates to preserve the dominant order) or the Catholic school (which teaches selected cultural principles). Others, such as the City University of New York, act in good faith to integrate, through the development of open admissions. The stated motivation of the educational institution does not affect the lack of change within the social structure.

As education functions to preserve the social structure, within these plays the educational system acts to preserve itself. Both the institutions and the characters who represent the system exhibit a high degree of self-interest and desire for self-preservation. The unseen Provost in Gurney acts to terminate Harper because continued teaching by the professor threatens the institution and its funding. In Oleanna, John utilizes the educational system for his own economic, social, and psychological welfare. Franklin, the headmaster of the deaf school in Children of a Lesser God, expresses his disapproval at the marriage of Sarah and James; he recognizes a successful marriage could begin to undermine the "educational" need to teach speech to the deaf and thus could challenge his personal position of power. Clare, the educator in the full-length version of Open Admissions, demonstrates keen awareness of how to utilize the educational system for both economic benefit outside the institution and political benefit within the institution. The dominant order is therefore further preserved since the institutions and their constituents are not unwilling participants in the status quo but rather active protectors of their own vested interests.

This desire for survival and self-advancement also diminishes the reader's perception of any active malice and prejudice aimed against marginalized groups.

Individuals such as Franklin or Clare act out of self-interest and interest for their institutions, not fundamental prejudice. We perceive little direct antagonism against the marginalized due to their inherent cultural qualities. Rather, they are disregarded because of their interference with the self-interest of others.

The works also demonstrate that cultural concerns are secondary to the needs of individuals. While individuals may be marginalized because they are considered as members of a group, the plays depict demarginalization as occurring on an individual basis. Shelby Steele, in The Content of Our Character, focuses upon this issue in regard to race:

To retrieve our individuality and opportunity, blacks today must--consciously or unconsciously--disregard the prevailing victim focused black identity. Though it espouses black pride, it is actually a repressive identity that generates a victimized self-image, curbs individualism and initiative, diminishes our sense of possibility, and contributes to our demoralization and inertia. (106)

The works do not advocate group empowerment, but suggest that removal of marginalization permits individuals the options to choose their own destinies (rather than be limited by grouping). The plays stand as advocates for humans as individuals rather than as amorphous parts of collective units, indicating no "group need" other than the removal of the boundary which inhibits individual opportunity.

This concept is reinforced through recognition that, within the plays, similar ranges of emotions and interests run between and among all characters. Love, hate, passion, self-interest are experienced by all individuals. Lauro depicts the families of Calvin and Ginny showing similar emotions of love and warmth. In Mamet's play, John and Carol equally exhibit viciousness and an ability to manipulate. James and Sarah demonstrate affection, hate, frustration. Sister Mary acts for the good of the students and demonstrates affection for Thomas. The cumulative effect of these plays suggests that all people, beneath external and artificial categorization, are the same. No one "culture" has a monopoly on the qualities of being human. According to these playwrights, the elimination of "grouping" will strengthen society since individuals will be free to pursue their own success, one not derived from, limited to, or set against any group.

This common perspective which emphasizes individual success is reinforced when we examine where change happens. In these works change does not occur on any social or structural level, but instead within individual characters. At the end of Uncommon Women and Others, the individual women begin to assert their personal desires. Miss Plumm goes bird-shooting, Carter makes a film, Leilah converts to Islam. In Children of a Lesser God Sarah and James, despite their failed marriage, achieve a

measure of resonant understanding; they comprehend the impossibility of their marriage in a world which cannot bridge their differences. In Open Admissions, Ginny demonstrates compassion when she sees Calvin as a single individual rather than a member of the larger, more amorphous group of "students." Harper ultimately acknowledges the merits of Judy's play when he does not group it with similar "contemporary" versions he has received.

Yet within these dramas, positive individual changes may be undermined by grouping. Harper places Birnbaum into his own fixed perspective of Jews, while Judy groups Harper as an anti-Semite. In Oleanna Carol's alignment with a group may temporarily increase her power but results in both the submergence of her individuality and personal devastation for the professor and herself. The categorizations perceived by Sarah and the social pressure placed upon the marriage between a "deaf person" and a "hearing person" doom it to failure. Conflicts and limitation are created when individuals conceive of themselves or others as members of groups. Therefore, the cumulative perspective of these plays suggests that any grouping of individuals, may, in the long run, be negative.

The methods by which the playwrights demonstrate the limitations of the educational system in providing opportunities vary. Three of the works--those of

Wasserstein, Medoff, and Lauro--depict a clear delineation and hence binary opposition between a marginalized cultural unit and a central social order which isolates and confines rather than integrates the minority culture. Within the works of Wasserstein and Medoff, the cultural identities--and subsequent oppositions--are defined by a single boundary; the authors do not emphasize their characters as existing within overlapping cultural units. Wasserstein highlights the fact that her characters are women aligned against a male-oriented dominant order; their high socioeconomic background carries little thematic emphasis. Medoff's work emphasizes the opposition between deaf and hearing, rather than gender or class. Lauro's work places Calvin within two overlapping cultures which align themselves against a dominant force; the black/poor (as a unit) are placed in opposition to the white/middle class (another unit). In fact the characters do exist as members of multiple cultural units; for example, in Children of a Lesser God James could be considered as a member of hearing culture, male culture, "60's" culture, or middle class culture. The playwrights, however, emphasize a single generative source for culture. The avoidance of complex cultural patterns strengthens the depiction of dominant/marginalized, since the playwrights, on a fundamental level, have two basic forces in opposition centered around a single focal

point; no complex interplays occur to distract from the essential conflict.

The Durang and Gurney plays also use a single boundary to define culture. Unlike the first works, however, the plays self-examine internal cultural values and systems without viewing them in opposition to an external force. For Durang, education grounded in Catholic culture denies the realities which exist outside the institutional boundaries. For Gurney, the traditional curriculum bounded by and taught to the white upper middle class is essentially positive, inspiring excellence and animating thought.

Mamet highlights the possession of power as the boundary which defines his characters. "Cultural identification," through such items as gender or class, is irrelevant except as a tool to manipulate the power dynamic. Mamet therefore begins to question the entire concept of cultural consciousness as an authentic means of self-identification.

The plays therefore negate the complex questions of overlapping cultures and multiple subtleties which occur in everyday living. Two recent examples demonstrate these real life complications unaddressed by the works. Although, as we have seen, the primary focus of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas conflict was one of sexual harassment, the confrontation also generated complicated passions within multiple communities due to overlapping

conflicts of race, class, gender, and politics. As Toni Morrison writes of the hearings:

The points of the vector were all the plateaus of power and powerlessness: white men, black men, black women, white women, interracial couples; those with a traditionally conservative agenda, and those representing neoconservative conversions; citizens with radical and progressive programs; the full specter of the "pro" antagonists ("choice" and "life"); there were the publically elected, the self-elected, the racial supremacists, the racial egalitarians, and nationalists of every stripe. (ix).

A more recent and direct example of the complex cultural intertwining occurs in a case which was recently argued before the Supreme Court. The issue before the Court is whether or not a deaf student, who is legally entitled to a state-funded interpreter if he attends public or private school, should continue to receive this support should his parents decide to enroll him in a religious affiliated institution which fulfills the state mandated educational requirements (Lewin A7).

The educational institutions themselves reinforce the single defining boundary for the depicted cultures. Each institution (other than that of Mamet) designates a specific purpose for the cultural unit associated with it. The deaf must learn speech. Catholic schools preserve the Catholic faith. At Mount Holyoke, the announcements before the scenes outline clear educational objectives for women. The overall educational system does not emerge as a network of broadly diverse

institutions educating an integrated mix of the general population but rather as a series of isolated environments, serving narrow constituent bases and failing to cut across cultural boundaries.

The narrow curriculum depicted within each work reinforces this concept of singular boundary. Students are given little basic information. The selected transmission of knowledge connects to the issue of power and social reconstruction. Sleeter and Grant describe the use of knowledge:

Knowledge is central to power. Knowledge helps us envision the contours and limits of our own existence, what is desirable and possible, and what actions might bring about those possibilities. Knowledge helps us examine relationships between what is ethical and what is desirable; it widens out experience; it provides analytical tools for thinking through questions, situations, and problems. Knowledge that empowers centers around the interests and aims of the prospective knower (50).

If we accept these functions, the denial of knowledge through limited curricula continues to maintain existing power structures and positions. Within the plays, the curricula which are seen to contain the most "content" are those of Durang--Catholic dogma--and Gurney--Greek tragedy and the canon. These institutions emphasize their homogenous composition and value structure; transmission of traditional cultural information serves the institutional and cultural interests of self-preservation. The transmitted knowledge, however,

does not extend beyond the limited boundaries of the culture, indicating selective information rather than broad based instruction. Catholics do not study the Koran; Gurney's students do not read Alice Walker. Selected knowledge thus reinforces existing perspectives. Wasserstein tends to ignore curriculum; the absence suggests its lack of influence within the lives of the women and serves to render the formal educational institution irrelevant to their development.

The other three plays--those of Medoff, Lauro, and Mamet--emphasize the development of speech and language. While the approaches of the plays are different, acceptance of and skill in the use of the dominant language system appears an established prerequisite, and therefore barrier, to further transmission of knowledge and advancement in the social order. Without development of language skills, access to the mainstream may not be achieved. As educator Selase W. Williams writes:

Language is essential to all educational endeavours . . . It is the primary vehicle for transmitting information from one generation to the next; it helps us organize our reality; it shapes the way we think (199).

If language does indeed perform these functions, then the plays reinforce how this mechanism preserves the dominant order, since only through use of the proper language--implying the correct organization of reality and thought process--can access to the dominant order be achieved. Medoff highlights a literal language barrier.

No knowledge is transmitted other than the learning of speech. Lauro places the use of speech patterns within a broader context. Proper speech patterns (sanctioned by the general social order) must be learned to advance within the social order; content is irrelevant. Mamet does not explicitly address the use of language through a curricular function. His play shows how the development of communication skills and an ability to articulate thought translates into the capacity to obtain power. John's ability to control language sustains his dominance; Carol's increase in linguistic skills parallels her increase in power.

We have thus seen the individual and cumulative implications of the plays regarding the educational system. How do these perspectives align with multicultural principles? How would those who advocate multiculturalism view these perspectives?

The plays represent education as a system which controls discourse and therefore upholds power structures; this principle aligns with the vision of social process evidenced in the multicultural argument. The idea of Foucault that "social and political power works through discourse" (Selden 103) appears valid. Yet multiculturalism also views education as a method of social change. As education professor B.H. Suzuki writes, education

should help students conceptualize a vision of a better society and acquire the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills to enable them to move the society toward greater equality and freedom, the eradication of degrading poverty and dehumanizing dependency, and the development of meaningful identity for all people (12).

The plays indicate that, while the educational system does indeed support the status quo, its value as a vehicle for change is limited.

This perspective does not necessarily indicate a failure of multicultural principles. Within the plays, only Open Admissions could be considered to address a practice which was clearly designed to achieve demarginalization. Those who advocate multiculturalism might applaud Lauro's criticism of the failure of the policy, one which was designed to promote opportunity.

As seen through the lens of multicultural principles, the depictions of education within the other works differ. The college of Wasserstein originated as a vehicle of male dominance. As viewed today under multicultural principles, the institution could be seen as negative, since it isolates women, or positive, since this isolation fosters the development of the cultural consciousness of women, a development many view as impossible under coeducational conditions. The deaf school is clearly isolationist and designed to continue the marginalization of the deaf. The school in Durang represents both a positive and negative under multicultural principles,

since Sister Mary instructs using a curriculum from a single culture (as advocated in such approaches as Single Group Studies) yet negative since the curriculum advocates a non-pluralistic approach to society. Gurney's play depicts a Eurocentric canon taught in an exclusionary environment; under multicultural principles, his institution would be classified as negative due to both the curriculum and the exclusionary context of the institution which supports the power of the white upper class. Oleanna provides little sense of institution or culture; however, due to the mutual destruction which occurs as a result of John's final and violent action, no change occurs. Under multicultural principles, Mamet's play could be viewed as negative since it not only suggests the strong impossibility of any change within power structures but devalues the concept of cultural consciousness except as a means of attaining power.

In the plays change does not occur on a structural or institutional level; it does, however, occur within individuals. This depiction of individual change questions the multicultural concept of group empowerment. The emphasis upon individual achievement devalues structural change, and could be interpreted as preserving the social structure, since change may occur despite any institutional obstacles. The discussion of racism by Sonia Nieto highlights this point. She refers to three levels of racism defined by James E. Jones. Individual racism

is a "personal belief" that one group is superior to another. Institutional racism is "manifested through established laws, customs, and practices that reflect and produce racial inequalities in society" (22). Cultural racism is the "belief in the inferiority of the culture of a group of people or even the belief they have no real culture." Nieto's next commentary carries importance:

Individual and cultural racism are belief systems that are acted on in the personal and individual spheres, whereas institutional racism is demonstrated primarily through the policies and practices of institutions, which directly affect those discriminated against as a class (22).

Under this approach, individual achievement cannot overcome the obstacles of institutional racism; as Nieto states

Prejudice . . . or discrimination . . . cannot be defined on only the personal level. It is not just a personality trait or a psychological phenomenon but also a manifestation of economic, political, and social forces. (23)

To imply, then, that individual effort can overcome these deep-rooted societal obstacles runs counter to the multicultural argument. Without structural change, individuals and groups will remain marginalized due to "institutional racism." The final overall perspective of the plays therefore may be considered contrary to multicultural principles; group empowerment and structural change are not necessary for social advancement.

Conversely, the fact that self-interest motivates the educational system and its members, not overt malice

against groups, also might be challenged by the advocates of multiculturalism. Nieto recognizes that racism may be not only structural but personal. Yet the overall perspective of the plays offers little suggestion of the "individual racism" which Nieto has described. The artistic depiction of individual self-interest therefore reduces the concept of individual prejudice against selected groups; personal racism, clearly a strong force in the real life marginalization of cultural units, is absent from these works.

We also must acknowledge that these plays emerge from the mainstream, commercial venue. If we accept the concept that a dominant order seeks to preserve itself, the plays' overall perspective serves to affirm the existing system. The cumulative emphasis upon an individual ability to overcome obstacles reinforces the idea that no structural change is necessary to achieve success. We must note that this affirmation is concealed within surface criticism of the educational system. No one would suggest, for example, that Lauro actually advocates the policy of open admissions as enacted within the educational system. Yet the depiction of a determined Calvin overcoming all obstacles to gain Alice's attention implies that determined individual effort can lead to success despite structural obstacles. As a vehicle of the dominant theatrical and commercial order--the New York stage, commonly considered the pinnacle (and,

indeed, sometimes the only) measure of true success within the theatre community, these plays affirm the continuation of the status quo. (This opens the broader question, beyond the scope of this inquiry, as to the manner in which plays are selected for production by the commercial theatre: are plays commercial because they do not challenge the existing social structure? How does the New York theatre community--in particular, Broadway producers--function as a dominant order? Can they be viewed as controllers of discourse, choosing those plays--much as the educational system selects curriculum--which will be viewed and accessed by the general public? How does this control affect the perception of "theatre" within the larger American social order?)

In conclusion, contemporary American drama suggests that, contrary to the common American belief that education is a vehicle for opportunity, the educational system functions as a method of continuing existing social structures. Marginalized groups obtain little encouragement or skills to advance within the general social order. The emphasis within the plays on the possibility of individual advancement despite social obstacles may, in fact, support the social order, since it suggests that structural change may not be necessary in order for individuals to succeed. Despite Susan A. Takata's statement that "Education is one avenue which offers

opportunities for success," the artistic representation
is clear: the roadway is closed.

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Walter Holton Placzek was born November 3, 1961 in Plainfield, New Jersey. A 1979 graduate of Rutgers Preparatory School, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the College of William and Mary in Virginia in May 1983.

Following graduation, he returned to New Jersey and spent seven years working in administration in the Division of Housing at Rutgers University. He maintained an active production interest in local theatres; he also pursued graduate work. He earned a Master of Arts in Spanish from Rutgers in October 1987, a Master of Arts in Theatre from Montclair State University in January 1990, and a Master of Education in Educational Administration from Rutgers in August 1990. In the fall of 1990 he was named a Louisiana State University Alumni Fellow and began full-time pursuit of his doctorate in Theatre.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

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Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Children of a Lesser Education:
Contemporary American Drama and Multiculturalism

Approved:

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